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"There are but three hundred and fifty dollars left," said the hermit, as he counted the pieces of gold. Page 107.

Frontispiece *Mark Manning's Mission*

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MARK MANNING'S MISSION

The Story of a Shoe Factory Boy

By HORATIO ALGER, JR.

Author of "Mark Mason's Victory," "Ben Bruce," "Bernard Brook's Adventures," "A Debt of Honor," etc., etc.

With Five Page Illustrations by J. Watson Davis

A. L. BURT COMPANY,
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MARK MANNING'S MISSION
By Horatio Alger, Jr.

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MARK MANNING'S MISSION.

CHAPTER I.

THREE YOUNG HUNTERS.

Two boys, with guns on their shoulders, were crossing a meadow towards the Pecasset woods. These were situated about a mile from the village, and were quite extensive. The two boys were James Collins and Tom Wyman, the first, the son of a large shoe manufacturer, the other the son of the village postmaster. They were about of a size, and had the appearance of being sixteen years of age. They were very intimate, the second being a satellite of the first, who in right of his father's wealth considered himself the first boy in Pecasset. Tom flattered his vanity by acknowledging his pretensions, and this gave him his position of favorite with the young aristocrat.

"I should like to be a hunter," said Tom, as they walked along.

"A fine hunter you'd be," said James, in a tone

by no means complimentary, for he didn't feel it necessary to flatter his humble companion. "You never hit anything, you know."

"Come, James, that's a little too strong," said Tom, in a tone of annoyance. "I don't pretend to be as good a shot as you are, but still I have hit a bird before now."

"When it was perched on a fence, eh?"

"No, on the wing."

"Who saw you do it?"

"I was alone."

"So I thought," said James, laughing.

"I did it, really. Of course I can't shoot as well as you."

"I don't think there is a boy in the village can come up to me in that line," said James.

"Of course not; though Mark Manning isn't a bad shot."

"Mark Manning! He's one of the peggers in my father's shop, isn't he?"

"Yes."

"Son of the poor widow that lives near the schoolhouse?"

"Yes."

"What can he know of gunning? He had better stick to the shop."

"I didn't say he was equal to you," said

Tom apologetically, "but I have seen him shoot well."

"Has he a gun of his own?"

"No, but he often gets the loan of Farmer Jones's."

"I suppose he could hit a barn door if he were within fifty feet of it," said James, contemptuously.

Tom was silent. It was not the first time he had noticed how distasteful to James was praise of any other boy.

At this moment, from another direction came a third boy, of about the same size and age as the two already introduced. He also had a gun on his shoulder. He had on a well-worn suit of mixed cloth, which had been darned in one or two places. His face was open and attractive, his form was well-knit and muscular, and he was evidently in vigorous health.

Tom Wyman was the first to notice the newcomer.

"Talk of the — old Harry," he said, "and he is sure to appear."

"What do you mean?" asked James, who had not yet espied the new arrival.

"There's Mark Manning coming towards us."

James condescended to turn his glance in Marks' direction.

"What brings him here, I wonder?" he said, with a curl of the lip.

"The same errand that brings us, I should judge, from the gun on his shoulder," answered Tom.

"By this time Mark was within calling distance."

"Hallo, boys!" he said. "Have you shot anything yet?"

"No," answered Tom. "Have you?"

"No, I have only just come."

"Why are you not in the shop?" demanded James, with the air of a young lord.

"Because we work only half-time to-day."

"I suppose you were glad of the holiday?"

"No, I would rather have worked. Half-work, half-pay, you know."

"I suppose that's quite an important consideration for a—a working boy like you," drawled James, with an air of patronage.

Mark surveyed James, with a quizzical smile, for he had a genuine boy's disdain for affectation, and James was a very good specimen of a self-conceited dude, though the latter term had not yet come into use.

"Yes," he said, after a slight pause, "it is a consideration—to a working boy like me."

"How much now does my father pay you?" inquired James, with gracious condescension.

"Seventy-five cents a day—that's the average."

"Very fair pay! I suppose you take it home to your mother?"

"Yes, I do," answered Mark.

"She's—ah—very poor, I hear."

Mark began to find his patronage on the whole rather oppressive. He had a sturdy independence of feeling that grew restive under the young patrician's condescension.

"We are poor," he answered, "but we have enough to eat, and to wear, and a roof to cover us—"

"Exactly. You are indebted to my father for that."

"I don't see how."

"Doesn't he employ you and pay you wages?"

"Yes, but don't I earn my wages by good work?"

"Really, my good fellow, I can't say. I presume you do passably well, or he wouldn't keep you in his employ."

"Then it seems to me we are even on that

score. However, I didn't come here to talk about myself."

Here there was a sudden diversion.

"Look, James! See that bird!" exclaimed Tom, in excitement.

The other two boys looked in the direction indicated, and saw a hawk flying swiftly, perhaps two hundred feet above them. The three simultaneously raised their guns, and Tom and James fired. But Mark, upon second thought reserved his fire, in order to give his two companions a chance.

Their guns were discharged, but in vain. The bird flew on, apparently unconcerned, considerably to their disappointment.

"Now it is my turn!" reflected Mark.

He raised his gun, and quickly pulled the trigger; the effect was soon seen. The bird fluttered its wings, then dropped quickly through the air.

"By Jove, Mark's hit him!" exclaimed Tom in excitement.

James frowned in evident displeasure.

"Yes, he was lucky!" he said significantly.

Mark had run forward to pick up the bird.

"I told you Mark was a good shot!" said Tom, who had not so much vanity to wound as James.

"I suppose you think him a better shot than

I, because he hit the bird and I didn't?" said James, reddening.

"No, I don't say that!"

"I tell you it was pure luck. I've heard of a man who shut his eyes when he fired, but he succeeded when all his companions failed. You can't judge of one by a single shot."

Here Mark came up with his trophy.

"I congratulate you on your success," said James, unpleasantly. "I suppose this is the first bird you ever shot?"

"Oh, no!" answered Mark smilingly. "I have shot a few before now."

"A fly lit on my nose just when I was pulling the trigger, or I should have brought him down."

"That was lucky for me," said Mark.

"Come, Tom," said James, drawing his companion away to the left. "We'd better separate, or we shall all be shooting at the same object."

"Good luck to you then!" said Mark, as the two left him.

"Thanks!" said Tom, but James deigned no notice of Mark's civility.

CHAPTER II.

THE HERMIT'S CABIN.

MARK smiled to himself as the boys left him.

"James doesn't care to associate with us working boys," he thought. "Well, I fancy he cares as much for my company as I do for his."

Mark was thoroughly independent and self-reliant, and had no disposition to trouble himself because a particular boy didn't care to associate with him.

He was not self-conceited, but he respected himself, and never would have been willing, like Tom Wyman, to play the part of an humble satellite to the son of a wealthy shoe manufacturer.

He reached the edge of the woods, and plunged into their shaded recesses. Here and there were paths more or less worn. One of these he took. It was a considerable time before he found anything to shoot at. Finally he fired at a squirrel, but the active little animal eluded him, and made his way to some covert, whence possibly he peeped out with twinkling eyes at his enemy.

Farther on he reached a small clearing, in the center of which rose an humble log dwelling, of the most primitive description.

Mark regarded it with curiosity, for, though it was no new object to him, he knew that it was occupied by a man who for five years had baffled the curiosity of the neighborhood.

Now and then he was seen in the village, whither he went to procure supplies of food and other necessaries. A striking figure he was, with his long flowing sandy beard, thickly flecked with gray hairs, high forehead, and long, circular cloak wrapped around his tall, spare form.

On his head he wore a Spanish sombrero, and his appearance in the streets never failed to attract the curious eyes of the children.

Once some rude boys followed him with jeers. but were never tempted to repeat the rudeness. With his long staff upraised, he gave chase to them, looking so terrible that they were panic-stricken, and with pale faces, scattered in all directions.

While Mark was standing near the hermit's cabin, he thought he heard a smothered groan proceeding from within.

"What can be the matter," he thought, "can old Anthony be sick?"

This was the name, correct or not, by which the hermit was known in the village.

He paused a moment in indecision, but on hearing the groan repeated, he overcame his scruples, and pushing open the door, which stood ajar, he entered.

On a pallet, at one corner of the main room, lay the old man, with his limbs drawn up, as if in pain. His back was towards the door.

"Who is there?" he asked, as he heard the door open.

"A friend," answered Mark. "Are you sick?"

"I have a severe attack of rheumatism," answered the old man.

"And you have no one to take care of you?" said Mark, pityingly.

"No; I have no friends," answered the old man, in a tone half sad, half bitter. "Come round to the foot of the bed; let me look at you," he added, after a pause.

Mark complied with his request.

Old Anthony regarded him attentively, and said, half to himself, "a good face! a face to be trusted!"

"I hope so," said Mark, with a feeling of pleasure. "Can I do anything for you?"

"You are willing to help old Anthony? You see I know what they call me in the village."

"Yes. I shall be willing and glad to do anything for you."

"You are a good boy. What is your name?"

"Mark Manning."

"I know who you are. Your mother is a widow."

"Yes."

"And poor."

"We have little money, but we have never wanted for food."

"You work for your mother?"

"Yes; I am employed in the shoe factory."

"A good son will make a good man. You will never repent what you are doing for your mother."

"No; I am sure I shall not," returned Mark, warmly. "I ought not, for she has done everything for me."

"What brings you here?" asked the old man.

"I had a spare afternoon, and came out gunning. I was wandering about these woods and happened to come this way. How long have you been sick?"

"For several days; but I was able to be about till yesterday."

"Have you taken no medicine?"

"No. I thought I might do without it; but I find I am mistaken."

"Shall I call the doctor?"

"No; my disease is of old standing, and I know what to do for it. If you are willing to go to the drug store for me you may take the bottle on yonder shelf and get it filled. The druggist will understand what is wanted. You may also get me a box of rheumatic pills."

"Yes, sir; I will go at once."

"You will want money. Look in the box on yonder shelf, and select a gold piece. Pay for the articles and bring back the change."

"Yes, sir."

Mark went to the shelf, and in a square wooden box found a collection of gold and silver coins from which he selected a five dollar gold piece.

"I have taken five dollars," he said.

"Very well."

"Are you not afraid to leave this money so exposed while you are sick and helpless?" Mark ventured to inquire.

"I have no visitors," answered old Anthony.

"But you might have. Some tramp——"

"That is true. Perhaps it would be well to provide for that contingency. Will you take it all, and take care of it for me?"

Mark regarded the old man with surprise.

"What—take it away with me?" he asked.

"Yes. I shall have to employ you as my man of business till I get better. I will speak with you about it further when you return with the medicines."

"Do you know how much there is here?" asked Mark.

"No; you may count it, if you like."

Mark did so and announced as the result of his count, "Twenty-nine dollars and thirty cents."

"Very well! You may keep an account of what you expend for me," said the old man, indifferently.

"He seems to put a good deal of confidence in me," Mark reflected, with some satisfaction.

"Is there nothing else you want in the village?" Mark asked, as he prepared to go.

"You may bring me a loaf of fresh bread and a quart of milk, if it will not be too much trouble. You will find a tin measure for the milk on the shelf."

"Here it is, sir."

"Very well."

"If you would like something nourishing—some meat, for instance—I can get my mother to cook you some," continued Mark.

"Not to-day. Another day I may avail myself of your kind offer. You are very kind—to a poor recluse."

"I am afraid you don't pass a very pleasant life," said Mark. "I should be miserable if I lived alone in the woods, like you."

"No doubt, no doubt. You are young and life opens before you bright and cheerful. As for me, I have lived my life. For me no prospect opens but the grave. Why, indeed, should I seek to prolong this miserable life?"

Mark hardly knew how to answer him. He could not enter into the old man's morbid feelings.

"I will be back soon," he said as he left the cabin.

CHAPTER III.

A TIMELY RESCUE.

MARK MANNING left the cabin and made his way as quickly as possible to the edge of the wood. He hadn't got over his wonder at the hermit's commission and singular confidence in him.

"It seems strange," he said to himself, "to have so much money in my pocket. Nearly thirty dollars! I wonder whether I shall ever have as much of my own?"

In truth, thirty dollars seemed a much larger sum to our hero, brought up in a hand to hand struggle with poverty, than it would have appeared if he had been ten years older.

"He must have more money," thought Mark, "or he would not care so little for this sum as to trust it all to me. How does he know that I will prove honest?"

Nevertheless it was a satisfaction to Mark to reflect that old Anthony was justified in his confidence. Had the sum been ten times as large, he

would not have been tempted to retain any of it for his own use.

He kept on his way to the drug store, and asked for the medicines already referred to.

"Is your mother sick?" asked the druggist, who was very well acquainted with Mark and his family.

"No, sir," answered Mark.

"Oh, then it is you who are rheumatic," said the druggist jokingly.

"Wrong again," answered Mark. "I am buying the medicines for old Anthony."

"Then he is sick? That accounts for his not having appeared in the village for several days."

Thereupon Mark described his chance visit to the cabin, and the condition in which he had found the hermit.

"These remedies will do him good," said the druggist, "if he is otherwise kept comfortable. A strange man is old Anthony!" he continued musingly.

Mark produced a gold piece, from which he requested the druggist to take pay for the articles purchased.

"Did the hermit give you this?" asked the druggist.

Mark answered in the affirmative.

"Then it is evident he is not without means. However, I might have known that. During the years that he has lived in the wood, he has always been prompt in his payments for all articles purchased in the village. His expenditures are small, to be sure, but in five years they have amounted to considerable."

"What could have induced him to settle in such a lonely spot?"

"That is more than any one hereabouts can tell. He is very secretive, and never says anything about himself."

By this time Mark was ready to return. He went to the grocery store, where he obtained the milk and loaf of bread, which he had also been commissioned to procure. Then he set out for old Anthony's lonely cabin.

Before doing so, he heard something from the grocer that aroused his curiosity.

"There was a man in here only twenty minutes since," said the storekeeper, "who was asking after Anthony."

"Was it a stranger?"

"Yes. It was a man I never saw before. He was a stout, broad-shouldered man with a bronzed face, who looked as if he might be a sailor."

"Did he say who he was?"

"Only that Anthony was a relation of his, and that he had not seen him for years."

"Did he say he meant to call upon him?" asked Mark.

"He did not say so, but as he inquired particularly for the location of the cabin, I took it for granted that this was his intention."

"Then probably I shall see him, as I am going directly back to the wood."

"He will probably be there unless he loses his way."

Leaving Mark to return by the same way he came, we will precede him, and make acquaintance with the man who had excited the grocer's curiosity by inquiring for the old hermit.

Old Anthony lay on his pallet waiting for the return of Mark.

"I like the boy," he said to himself. "He has an honest face. He looks manly and straightforward. He has never joined the other village boys in jeering. If my nephew had been like him he might have been a comfort to me."

The old man sighed. What thoughts passed through his mind were known only to him; but that they were sad ones seemed clear from the expression of his face.

Time passed as he lay quiet. Then he heard a

noise at the door and the step of one entering the cabin.

"Is that you, Mark?" he inquired.

There was a pause. Then a harsh voice answered: "No; it isn't Mark, whoever he may be. It is some one who ought to be nearer to you than he."

Old Anthony started in evident excitement, and by an effort managed to turn round his head so as to see the intruder.

His eyes rested on a man rather above the middle height, shabbily clad, with a dark face and threatening expression.

"Lyman Taylor!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, Lyman Taylor," returned the other, mockingly. "Are you glad to see your nephew."

"Heaven knows I am not!" said old Anthony bitterly.

"So I judged from your expression. Yet they say blood is thicker than water."

"That there is any tie of blood between us I regret deeply. A man more utterly unworthy I have never known."

"Come, Uncle Anthony, isn't that a little strong. I am no angel——"

"You are a worthless scoundrel," said the hermit bitterly.

"Look here, old man," said his nephew fiercely, "I didn't come here to be insulted and called bad names. Considering that you are alone and in my power, it is a little impertinent in you to talk in that way. I might kill you."

"You are quite capable of it," said Anthony. "Do so, if you choose. Life is not a possession that I greatly prize."

"I have a great mind to take you at your word," said Taylor coolly, "but it wouldn't suit my purpose. Your death would do me no good unless you have made me your heir. I am desperately in need of money."

"Work for it, then!"

"Thank you! You are very kind; but employers are rather shy of me. I have no recommendations to offer. I don't mind telling you that I have spent the last four years in prison."

"A very suitable place for you," said the old man in a caustic tone.

"Thank you again! You are complimentary."

"This is the reason why you have not found me out before?"

"Precisely. You don't suppose I would otherwise have kept away from you so long, my most affectionate uncle!"

"Do you recall the circumstances of our last parting? I awoke in California to find myself robbed of the large sum of money I had with me. Of course, you took it."

"I don't mind owning that I did. But I haven't a cent of it left."

"That I can easily believe. Why have you sought me out?"

"I want more money."

"So I supposed. You can judge from my way of living whether I am likely to have any for you."

"You don't appear to be living in luxury. However, it costs something to keep body and soul together even in this den. Of course, you have some money. However little it is, I want it."

"Then you will be disappointed."

"Where do you keep your money?" demanded Lyman Taylor, roughly.

"Even if I had any. I wouldn't tell you!" said the brave old man.

"Look here, old man, no trifling! Either you will find some money for me, or I will choke you?"

He got down on one knee and stooped menacingly over the hermit.

At that moment Mark Manning, who had returned from his errand, reached the doorway, and stood a surprised and indignant witness of this exciting scene.

Old Anthony struggled, but ineffectually in the grasp of the ruffian who had attacked him. Even if he had not been disabled by disease he would not have been a match for Lyman Taylor, who was at least twenty-five years younger.

"Don't touch me, you scoundrel!" said Anthony, whose spirit exceeded his bodily strength.

"Then tell me where you keep your money!"

"That I will not do!"

"Then I'll see if I can't find a way to make you."

As he spoke the young man grabbed the hermit by the throat. He concluded too hastily that old Anthony was in his power. He was destined to a surprise.

"Let the old man alone!" cried Mark, indignantly.

Lyman Taylor looked up in surprise and some alarm. But when he saw that the words proceeded from a boy, he laughed derisively.

"Mind your own business, you young bantam, or I'll wring your neck!" he said contemptuously. "Now, let me know where you keep your money,"

he said, turning once more to the old man, and preparing to choke him into an avowal of his secret.

"Let go, instantly, or I will shoot!" exclaimed Mark, now thoroughly aroused.

Once more the ruffian turned, and this time his countenance changed, for Mark, boyish but resolute, had dropped his bundles, and had the musket pointed directly at him.

Taylor rose to his feet suddenly.

"Take care, there!" he said, nervously. "Put down that gun!"

"Then leave old Anthony alone!" returned Mark, resolutely.

"Are you my uncle's guardian?" demanded Lyman, with a sneer.

"If he is your uncle, the more shame to you to treat him brutally!"

"I didn't come here to be lectured by a boy," said Taylor, angrily. "Put down that gun!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE HERMIT EXPLAINS.

MARK did not obey directly, but turning to the hermit said, "Do you want this man to leave the cabin?"

"Yes," answered the old man, but beware of him! He is all that is bad!"

"A pretty recommendation to come from your uncle," said Taylor, sullenly. "Uncle Anthony, I ask you once more to give me money. I am penniless, and am a desperate man."

"There is no money in this cabin, and you would search for it in vain, but if you will promise to leave this place and trouble me no more, I will provide you with five dollars."

"What are five dollars?"

"All that you will get. Do you make the promise?"

"Well, yes—"

"Mark, you may give this man five dollars on my account."

"Is he your treasurer?" inquired Taylor, in surprise.

"He has charge of some funds out of which he buys me what I need."

"How much money have you got of my uncle's, boy?"

"I don't care to answer the question. Ask your uncle."

"A small sum only. It won't be worth your while, Lyman, to plot for its possession."

"Have you no other money?"

"None that you are likely to get hold of. I will save you the trouble of searching the cabin, or prowling round it, by repeating that I have no money concealed here. You know me well enough to know that I am not deceiving you."

Lyman Taylor listened in sullen disappointment. He did know that his uncle's word could be relied upon implicitly, and that the hopes which he had built up of securing a large fund from the uncle he had once robbed, were not destined to be realized.

"It seems you are a pauper, then," he said.

"I have not been compelled to ask for charity yet," answered Anthony. "I live here for next to nothing, and have not suffered yet for the necessities of life."

Lyman Taylor looked around him contemptuously.

"You must have a sweet time living here," he said, "in this lonely old cabin."

"I would not exchange it for the place in which you confess that you have passed the last four years."

Taylor frowned, but did not otherwise notice the old man's retort.

"Give me the five dollars, boy," he said, "and I will go. It seems I am wasting time here."

Mark drew a gold piece from his pocket and passed it to him.

"Have you many more of these?" he demanded, his eyes gleaming with cupidity.

"No."

"Give me another."

"They are not mine to give."

"Not another one, Mark," said Anthony. "He does not deserve even that."

"Make way, then, and I will go," said the nephew, convinced that he had no more to expect.

Mark moved aside, and he strode out of the cabin.

"Good-bye, Uncle Anthony," he said. "You haven't treated me very generously, considering how long it is since you did anything for me."

"Are you utterly shameless, Lyman?" said the hermit. "I hope never to set eyes on you again."

"Thank you, you are very kind. Boy, what is your name?"

"Mark Manning."

"Well, Mark, as you appear to be in charge of my uncle, I shall be glad to have you write me if anything happens to him. As his nearest relative and heir, I ought to be notified."

Mark looked to the hermit for directions.

"Give him your address, Lyman," said Anthony. "If there is any news to interest you, he shall write. But don't calculate on my speedy death. It is hardly likely to benefit you."

"I may want to visit your grave, uncle," said Lyman, jeeringly.

"Give him an address where a letter will reach you then."

"No. —— Third Avenue, New York," said Taylor. "Write soon."

He left the cabin, and old Anthony and Mark were alone.

"He is my nearest relative," said the old man, "and a relative to be proud of, eh, Mark?"

"No, sir."

"Years since we were in California together,

I had two thousand dollars in gold dust under my pillow. My nephew was my companion, but none of the gold belonged to him. I woke one morning to find my nephew gone, and my gold also. From that time I have not set eyes on him till to-day."

"It was a shabby trick," said Mark, warmly. "Were you left destitute?"

"So far as money went, yes. But I was the owner of a claim which my nephew thought exhausted. I resumed work on it, and three days later made a valuable find. Within a month I took out ten thousand dollars, and sold it for five thousand more."

"Your nephew does not know this, does he?"

"No; if he had, I should not have got rid of him so easily. But I have not told you all. I remained in California a year longer, and left it worth forty thousand dollars."

"Then why—excuse me for asking—have you come to this poor cabin to live?" asked Mark.

"I had one other relative than Lyman, a daughter—I left her at a boarding-school in Connecticut. I returned to find that she had married an adventurer a month previous. Two years later I heard of her death. Life had lost its charm for me. I would not deprive myself of

it, but in a fit of misanthropy I buried myself here."

Old Anthony seemed weary, and Mark questioned him no more, but set before him the milk and loaf which he had brought with him.

CHAPTER V.

LYMAN TAYLOR MAKES A NEW ACQUAINTANCE.

On leaving the cabin Mark promised to call again the next afternoon, bringing from the village such articles as Anthony might require. This he could readily do as the shoe manufactory was not running full time.

"I will see that you are paid for your trouble," said the hermit.

"That will be all right," said Mark, cheerfully.

"I am able to pay you, and will employ you only on that condition," persisted Anthony.

"I shall not object to that part of the bargain," said Mark, smiling. "Money never comes amiss to me."

"I have plenty of money, though I would not admit it to my nephew," continued the sick man. "He would persecute me till I bought him off. Fortunately he thinks I am poor."

"But," said Mark, "suppose he should come back. Would not your money be in danger?"

"He would find none here. I do nc
in this cabin. I did have some, but it is in
hands."

"Shall I not return it to you, sir?"

"No; I prefer that you should keep it. You will be using money for me daily, and for the present you shall be my treasurer."

"I am very much obliged to you for reposing so much confidence in me," said Mark.

"I trust you entirely. You have an honest face."

"Thank you, sir. I will endeavor to deserve your confidence."

It was past four o'clock when Mark left the cabin and started on his way homeward. He walked along thoughtfully, carrying his gun over his shoulder.

"It seems I have a near friend," he reflected; "and one who may be of service to me. Now that the shop is no longer running full time, it will be convenient to earn a little extra money, old Anthony must be rich, judging from what he said about his success in California."

Mark could not help wondering where the hermit kept his money. But for Anthony's positive assurance, he would have conjectured that he kept it somewhere concealed about the cabin,

but that being left out of the question he was at a loss to fix upon any probable place of deposit.

Leaving Mark for a brief time; we go back to the other two young hunters, from whom he had separated two hours before.

"I don't like that boy," said James Collins. "He puts on too many airs for a poor boy. I suppose he will be crowing over his successful shot."

"Very likely," chimed in his companion, who made it a point to flatter James by agreeing with everything he said.

"It was only a lucky accident," continued James. "He couldn't do it again."

"Of course not. I don't think he is really as good a shot as you or I."

"You can hardly class yourself with me," said James egotistically. "However, I agree with you that he is inferior to you."

"Quick, James!" said Tom Wyman. "There is a squirrel—shoot! I'll give you the first chance."

James pulled the trigger, but the squirrel was not destined to fall by his hands. He scampered away, looking back saucily at the baffled young hunter.

"Was ever anything more provoking?" asked James in evident chagrin.

Later in the afternoon when the two boys were slowly strolling homewards, they saw a strange man issuing from the woods. It was Lyman Taylor, returned from his only partially successful visit to his uncle.

He waited till the boys came up.

"Good afternoon, young gentlemen," he said by way of greeting.

"Good-afternoon," returned James stiffly.

He doubted whether the newcomer was a man whom it was worth while to notice.

"What luck have you had? I see you have been out hunting."

"We didn't shoot anything we thought worth bringing home," said Tom.

"I met another boy out with a gun. Perhaps he is a friend of yours."

James and Tom exchanged glances. They understood very well that Mark Manning was meant.

"I think I know the boy you met," said James. "It is a poor boy who works in my father's manufactory."

"What is his name?" asked Lyman Taylor.

"Mark Manning."

"Does he live in the village?"

"Yes; his mother is a poor widow."

"Where did you meet him?" asked Tom.

"At a cabin in the woods."

"Old Anthony's?"

"Yes; the hermit is an uncle of mine."

The two boys regarded the speaker with interest. All the villagers had some curiosity about the man who had settled so near them.

"What is his name?" inquired Tom.

"You called him old Anthony," said Lyman, smiling. "That is his name."

"But his other name?"

"His last name is Taylor, I have not seen him before for five years. Does he often come into the village?"

"About twice a week."

"I suppose he comes to buy food?"

"Yes; I suppose so."

"Does he appear to be provided with money?" asked Taylor with some eagerness.

"Yes, I believe so," replied Tom. "He has sometimes come into our place—father is the postmaster—to get a gold piece changed. But I don't suppose he has much money. It doesn't cost him much to live."

"Does he ever get any letters—as your father is postmaster, you can probably tell."

"I don't think so; my father has never mentioned it, and I think he would if any had been received."

"What sort of a boy is this Mark Manning?" asked Taylor abruptly.

"I don't think much of him," answered James. "He is poor and proud. He is only a pegger in our shop, but he puts on airs with the best."

"Do you think he is honest?"

The two boys looked surprised; that question had never occurred to them.

"What makes you ask?" inquired James.

"Only that he has in his possession a sum of money belonging to my uncle."

"Did he tell you so? did you see it?" were the questions quickly asked.

"I met him at my uncle's cabin. My uncle owed me a small sum, and instead of paying me himself, he asked this boy to pay me. The boy took the money from his pocket, and handed it to me."

Both boys were surprised.

"I didn't know he had anything to do with the hermit," said Tom. "Did you, James?"

"No; but then I don't trouble myself about Mark Manning's affairs."

Lyman Taylor regarded James shrewdly, he

had no difficulty in detecting the boy's dislike towards Mark.

"Excuse my troubling you with questions, young gentlemen," he said. "My uncle is a simple-minded old man, and it would be easy to rob him, though I fancy he hasn't much money. This boy Mark appeared to me an artful young rogue, who might very probably cheat him out of the small sum he has."

"I never saw the two together," said Tom, musingly. "Old Anthony has generally paid his bills himself."

"He is sick just now, and perhaps that accounts for it. The boy Mark has been making purchases for him in the village. However, I must leave the place, as important business calls me elsewhere. Since you," addressing Tom, "are the postmaster's son, may I ask a favor of you?"

"Certainly."

"If my uncle should die, can I trouble you to send me a note informing me, as I should feel called upon, as his only relative, to see that he was properly buried."

"Yes, sir; I will write you, if you will leave me your address."

Lyman Taylor gave Tom the same address he

had already given Mark. He then bade the boys good-bye, and walked on.

"Uncle Anthony *may* have some money," he soliloquized, "and if he dies, I shall see if I can find it. I am pretty sure to hear through one of the boys."

CHAPTER VI.

A TRAGEDY IN THE PASTURE.

On their way home the two boys had occasion to cross a pasture belonging to Deacon Miller, an old farmer whose house and barn were about a furlong distant on a rising ground.

They sauntered along in single file. James had a careless way of carrying his gun, which made some of the boys unwilling to accompany him, unless it was unloaded. Tom had two or three times cautioned him on this very afternoon, but James did not receive his remonstrance in good part.

"Don't trouble yourself so much about my gun, Tom Wyman," he said. "I guess I know how to carry my gun as well as you do."

"I don't doubt that in the least, James, but you must admit that you handle it rather carelessly. Some of the boys don't like to go hunting with you."

"Then they are cowards. I never shot any boy yet," answered James, with some heat.

"No, but you might."

"You are making a great deal of fuss about nothing. I didn't think you were so timid."

"I don't know that I am particularly timid, but I shouldn't like to be riddled with shot," returned Tom, good-humoredly.

"Then you'd better get your life insured when you go out with me next," sneered James.

"I don't know but I shall," said Tom, declining to take offense.

For a very brief period James carried his gun more carefully. Then he forgot his caution, and in transferring his gun from one shoulder to the other somehow he touched the hammer, and the gun was discharged.

It was most unfortunate, but when the gun went off it was pointed directly at a white-faced cow belonging to Deacon Miller.

The small shot penetrated both the poor animal's eyes, and with a moan of anguish the cow sank to the ground.

Both boys stared in dismay at the victim of carelessness.

"There, you've gone and done it now, James," said Tom. "You've shot Deacon Miller's cow."

"I don't see how I happened to do it," stammered James, really frightened.

"I told you not to carry your gun so carelessly."

"You told me! Of course you want to get me into trouble about this!" exclaimed James, irritably.

"No, I don't."

"Then," said James, quickly, "don't say a word about it. We'll get home as soon as we can, and won't know anything about it. Mum's the word!"

"Of course I'll be mum, but it will be known that we have been out with guns this afternoon."

"So has Mark Manning."

James looked significantly at Tom, and Tom understood.

Poor Mark was to bear the blame for a deed he didn't do, and all to screen James.

"It's mean!" Tom said to himself, "but I can't go back on James. I want to keep in with him, and I suppose I must consent."

"Well?" demanded James, impatiently.

"It won't come out through me," answered Tom, but not with alacrity.

"And if Mark is accused you won't say anything?"

"N-o!" said Tom, slowly.

"Then let us put for home!"

James suited the action to the word, and the two boys hurried across the pasture, never venturing to look back at the suffering animal.

Fifteen minutes later, when James and Tom were already at home, Mark Manning entered the narrow foot-path that led across the pasture.

He was immersed in thought, the hermit and his strange experience at the cabin being the subject of his reflections, when he heard a pitiful moaning, not far from him.

Looking up he observed that it proceeded from old Whitey, as the deacon was accustomed to call his favorite cow.

"What's the matter with you, old Whitey?" said Mark, who was always moved by distress, whether in man or beast.

Coming nearer, he was not long left in doubt. The nature of the injury which the poor cow had received was evident to him.

"Poor old Whitey!" he said, pitifully. "Who has shot you in this cruel manner?"

The sole answer was a moan of anguish from the stricken animal.

"I am afraid she will have to be killed!" thought Mark, sadly. "It is only torture for her to live with this injury, and of course there is no cure."

nity. "I have just come up, and this is the condition in which I found Whitey,"

"What's that you are carryin' in your hand?" demanded the deacon, sternly.

"My gun."

"I am glad you are willin' to tell the truth. I didn't know but you'd say it was a hoe," exploded the deacon in angry irony.

"Your cow has received no injury from my gun, if that's what you're hinting at, Deacon Miller."

"Let me take the gun!"

In some surprise Mark put it into his hands.

The deacon raised it, and pulled the trigger.

No report was heard. The gun was not loaded.

"Just what I thought," said the deacon, triumphantly. "If it had been loaded, I might have thought you told me the truth. Now I know as well as I want to that you shot my cow in the face with it."

"I assure you, Deacon Miller," said Mark, earnestly, beginning to comprehend the extent to which he was implicated, although innocent. "I assure you, Deacon Miller, that I have had nothing to do with harming poor Whitey."

"Anyway, I shall hold you responsible, and I reckon you'll have hard work to prove yourself

innocent," said the deacon, grimly. "I ain't going to lose a forty-five dollar cow, and say nothin' about it. You jest tell your mother when you go home to see about raisin' forty-five dollars to make up old Whitey's loss. As she's a poor widder I'll give her thirty days to do it in. Do you hear?"

"Yes, Deacon Miller, I hear, but I repeat that I didn't harm your cow, and I shan't pay you a cent."

"We'll see!" was the only answer the deacon gave, nodding his head with emphasis.

Poor Mark! he had never felt so miserable, as he plodded slowly home. He was innocent, but circumstances were against him, and the deacon was implacable.

CHAPTER VII.

MARK AT HOME.

MARK'S home was a small cottage of a story and a half, surmounted by a sloping roof. It was plainly furnished, but looked comfortable. His mother was a pleasant looking woman of middle age, who managed well their scanty income, consisting chiefly of Mark's earnings.

"Are you not later than usual, Mark?" she inquired.

"Yes, mother; I went out gunning, and did an errand for old Anthony, who is laid up with the rheumatism in his cabin."

"Poor man! I hope he won't suffer."

"Thanks to me, he probably will not."

"What can you do for him, Mark? You have no money to spare."

"Haven't I, mother?" asked Mark, with a smile, as he drew from his pocket a large handful of silver and gold.

"What do you say to that?"

"Oh, Mark! I hope you came honestly by that money," said the widow, nervously.

"I haven't been robbing a bank, if that's what you mean, mother. I couldn't very well, as there is none within ten miles."

"Then, Mark, where did the money come from?"

"It belongs to old Anthony. He asked me to take charge of it, as I shall need to be buying things for him in the village for a few days to come."

"For mercy's sake, be careful of it, Mark, as, if you lost it, we couldn't make up the loss."

"I'll look after that. In fact, I think it will be safer with me than with the owner. If any dishonest person should enter his cabin, he could not help being robbed in his present condition."

"That would be very unfortunate, as the old man is probably very poor."

Mark was about to undeceive his mother, but, reflecting that Lyman Taylor might still be in the village, he thought it not prudent to betray the hermit's secret.

"I heard a report to-day, Mark," said his mother, as she was setting the supper-table, "that the shoe-shop was to be closed for a month."

"I hope not," said Mark, startled. "That would be serious for us."

"And for others too, Mark."

"Yes. It isn't as if there were other employments open, but there is absolutely nothing, unless I could get a chance to do some farm work."

"Perhaps Deacon Miller may need a boy."

"He's about the last man I would work for. He wouldn't pay me a cent."

"Why not, Mark? He wouldn't expect you to work for nothing."

"He claims that I owe him forty-five dollars, and would expect me to work it out."

"What do you mean, Mark? How can you owe the deacon forty-five dollars?"

"I don't, but he claims I do."

Mark then told his mother the story of the cow.

"Deacon Miller expects me to pay for it," he concluded, "but I think he'll have to take it out in expecting."

"Oh, Mark, I am afraid this will lead to serious trouble," said Mrs. Manning, looking distressed. "He may go to law about it."

"He can't make me pay for the damage somebody else did, mother."

"But if he makes out that you shot the cow?"

"I won't trouble about it. It might spoil my appetite for supper. I've got a healthy appetite to-night, mother."

"Your story has taken away mine, Mark."

"Don't worry, mother; it will all come right."

"I am afraid worrying comes natural to me, Mark. I've seen more trouble than you have, my son."

"Forget it all till supper is over, mother."

Supper was scarcely over when a knock was heard at the door, and John Downie entered. He was a boy of Scotch descent, and lived near by.

"How are you, Johnny," said Mark, "won't you have some supper?"

"Thank you, Mark, I've had some. Have you heard about Deacon Miller's cow?"

"What about her?" asked Mark, eagerly.

"You know old Whitey?"

"Yes, yes."

"Her eyes are put out by an accidental discharge of a gun, and I guess she will have to be killed."

"Do you know who shot her?" asked Mark, with intense interest.

"Yes, I do, but the deacon doesn't," answered John.

"Who was it?"

"James Collins. He and Tom Wyman were coming through the pasture, when James, in handling his gun awkwardly, managed to discharge it full in poor Whitey's face."

"How do you know it was James?"

"Because I saw it. I was in the next field and saw it all."

"Did the boys see you?"

"No; they hurried away as fast as they could go."

"Johnny, you're a trump!" exclaimed Mark, rising and shaking the boy's hand vigorously.

"Why am I a trump?" asked Johnny, astonished.

"Because your testimony will clear me. The deacon charges me with shooting the cow, and wants me to pay forty-five dollars."

"Gosh!" exclaimed Johnny. "But what makes him think you shot old Whitey?"

Mark briefly explained.

"But," said Mrs. Manning, "surely James Collins would not permit you to suffer for his fault?"

"You don't know James, mother. That's just what he would do, I feel sure. What do you say, Johnny?"

"Jim Collins is just mean enough to do it," answered John.

"He can't do it now, however. Mr. Collins is abundantly able to pay for the cow, and I guess he'll have to."

"I don't know how we could ever have paid so large a sum," said the widow

"We shan't have to, mother, that's one comfort."

"There's the deacon coming!" exclaimed Johnny, suddenly.

"So he is! Johnny, just run into the kitchen, and I'll call you when you're wanted. We'll have some fun. Mother, don't say a word till we hear what the deacon has to say."

By this time the deacon had knocked. Mrs. Manning admitted him, and he entered with a preliminary cough.

"Are your family well, deacon?" asked the mother.

"They're middlin', widder, which is a comfort. Families are often a source of trouble," and here the deacon glanced sharply at Mark, who, rather to his surprise, looked cool and composed.

"That may be, Deacon Miller, but I am thankful that Mark never gives me any trouble."

"Don't be too sure of that, ma'am," said the

deacon, grimly. "It's about that very thing I've come here now. Your son has shot my most valuable cow, old Whitey, and I regret to say, widder, that he'll have to make it good for me. Forty-five dollars is what the critter is worth, and I wouldn't have taken that for her."

"Are you sure Mark shot your cow?" asked Mrs. Manning.

"As sure as I need to be. I caught him standin' by the cow with his gun in his hand. The barrel was empty, for I tried it to see."

"What have you to say to this charge, Mark?"

"That Deacon Miller is mistaken. I did not shoot his cow."

"I reckon you'll have to pay for it all the same. Mark Manning. I don't want to be hard on a poor widder, but it stands to reason that I should be paid for my cow."

"I agree to that," said Mark, "but I'm not the one."

"Mebbe the cow shot herself!" said the deacon, sarcastically. "It may be nat'ral for cows to commit suicide, but I never saw one do it as far as I can remember. Young man, your story is too thin."

CHAPTER VIII.

DEACON MILLER GETS A CLUE.

MARK was forced to smile at the idea of old Whitey committing suicide. The deacon observed his smile, and it provoked him.

"Do you mean to say, Mark Manning, that you think the critter shot herself in the face?" he demanded, sharply.

"No, Deacon Miller, I have no such idea."

"That's the same as admittin' that you shot her," said the deacon, triumphantly.

"No, it isn't, deacon. I didn't shoot her, but I have no doubt some one else did."

"It may have been the cat," remarked the deacon, with a return to sarcasm.

"It was probably a two-legged cat," said Mark.

"Jest my idee!" remarked the deacon, quickly, "An' that brings it home to you. You was out with a gun, an' I caught you standin' beside the cow."

"As to catching me," returned Mark, "there

was no catching about it. I was crossing the pasture, and was attracted by the poor animal's moans. That is the way I happened to be near when you came up."

"That all sounds very smooth," said the deacon, impatiently, "but if you didn't shoot the cow, who did?"

"I think that question can be answered, Deacon Miller; John Downie!"

To the deacon's surprise, John came into the room at this summons,

"Johnny," said Mark, "will you tell the deacon who shot his cow!"

"I don't like to tell," objected John; "it wasn't done on purpose."

"Did you do it?" queried the deacon, sharply.

"No, *sir*. I never fired a gun in my life."

"Who did it, then?"

"Must I tell, Mark?"

"Yes, Johnny; Deacon Miller has a right to know; even if it was not done on purpose, the one who did it ought to make good the loss."

"That's where you speak sense, Mark," said the deacon, approvingly.

"Then it was Jim Collins."

"James Collins—the squire's son!" repeated the deacon, astonished,

"Yes."

John proceeded to tell the story once more. The deacon, it is needless to say, listened very attentively.

"So the boys run away, did they?" he inquired, grimly.

"Yes, sir."

"And I s'pose you'd have run away, too, if you had done it, hey?"

"Perhaps I might," answered John, ingenuously. "I s'pose they were scared."

"I'll scare 'em," growled the deacon. "Squire Collins is able to make up the loss to me, and I mean he shall." Then, with a momentary suspicion, "This ain't a story you an' Mark have got up between you, to get him off, is it?"

"I will answer that, Deacon Miller," said Mark firmly. "If I had shot your cow, I wouldn't have run away, but I'd have gone right to you and told you about it, and I'd have paid you just as soon as I could."

"That's right, that's right," said the deacon, approvingly, beginning to regard Mark with more favor. "Well, I must go and see the squire, Here, you John Downie, come along with me."

"I've got to go home," said John.

"But I can't prove it without you."

"You can tell the squire that I saw it done, and am ready to swear to it, if he wants me to."

"Mebbe that'll do! if I send for you, you'll come, hey?"

"Yes, sir."

The deacon did not feel disposed to postpone what he regarded as important business, and he left the cottage, taking the shortest direction to the squire's more imposing dwelling. We will precede him.

James Collins and his friend, as already described, ran away as fast as their legs could carry them, when they ascertained what damage had been done.

No one, so far as they knew, had seen them, and they hoped to escape, scot free.

Tom accompanied James home, and stayed to supper. After supper the boys went out, and had a conference together.

James felt a little nervous, though he believed that he was safe from incurring suspicion.

"I wonder if the deacon has found old Whitey yet?" said James,

"I guess so," answered Tom. "He usually goes after the cows before this."

"I wonder how he'll think it happened?"

"Maybe he'll lay it to Mark,"

James was not very much disturbed at this supposition.

"That would be a good joke!" he said.

"Not for Mark."

"Mark can take care of himself. He was out with a gun as well as we."

"His mother couldn't afford to pay for the cow," said Tom, who was rather more considerate than his companion.

"That's none of my business. And, Tom, there's something I want to say to you."

"Go ahead!"

"If Mark is accused, don't you go to saying it's a mistake. Remember it's none of your business."

Tom looked uncomfortable, having some conscience.

"It would be rough on a poor woman like Mrs. Manning having to pay for the deacon's cow."

"You're mighty considerate, Tom. You might consider me a little. If it were known that I shot the cow, father would make me pay at least half the bill out of my money in the savings' bank. I thought you were my friend?"

"So I am."

"Then you won't betray me. As for Mark, the deacon can't prove it against him, so he won't have to pay."

"Then the deacon will lose his cow, and get no pay."

"He can afford it. He's a stingy old lunks, anyway."

"That's true enough."

"And it won't ruin him if he does lose the cow. He's able to buy another."

It struck Tom, though he was not over conscientious, that this was not exactly the way to regard the matter, but he did not like to offend James, and he had ventured to oppose him more than usual already. So he remained silent.

James was not quite satisfied with his friend. He was not altogether sure of his fidelity.

"I've got only one thing to say, Tom," he added. "If you go back on me, and breathe a word of what happened in the pasture, I'll never speak to you again as long as I live."

"Who's going back on you? did I say I was?" demanded Tom rather irritably.

"All right, then; I only wanted to have the thing understood between us, I didn't really think you would be mean enough to tell."

So a satisfactory understanding was established between the two boys, and it looked as if Mark was likely to be the victim of their alliance.

But just when James was beginning to feel

secure, he was startled by an apparition just looming in sight on the highway. It was not a formidable figure—that of Deacon Miller—but under the circumstances James turned pale and his heart began to beat.

"Tom," he gasped; "isn't that Deacon Miller coming up the road?"

"It's the deacon sure enough!" answered Tom, looking disconcerted.

"Do you think he's coming here?" queried James nervously.

"Looks like it?" muttered Tom.

"Do you think he can have——heard anything?"

"Perhaps he heard that we were out with guns?" suggested Tom. "He may have come to make inquiries."

"Just so, now, Tom, be careful not to look as if there was anything the matter. We'll be extra polite to the old fellow."

"All right!"

"He may not be coming here after all."

But he was! arrived at the gate Deacon Miller paused, and opening it entered the front yard. He looked sharply at the two boys who were standing on the lawn.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DEACON'S MISSION.

ORDINARILY James would not have considered Deacon Miller worth any polite attention, but the knowledge of what had happened in the pasture had its effect upon him. He thought it necessary by a little attention to disarm the deacon's suspicions if he had any.

"Good evening, Deacon Miller," he said politely. "Did you wish to see father?"

"Wal," said the deacon deliberately. "I have a little business with him. Is he at home?"

"I am pretty sure he is," answered James. "Come in with me, and I'll see."

The deacon smiled—an inscrutable smile—and followed James, who opened the front door and led him into the parlor.

"You're very obligin'," he said. "I had no idea you was so polite."

"It is the duty of a gentleman to be polite!" said James loftily.

"So 'tis, so 'tis!" returned the old man chuckling in an unaccountable manner. "I'm glad you think so. It's a great thing to be a boy, I had lots of fun when I was a boy. So do you, hey?"

"Oh yes," answered James indifferently. "But not as much as I could have in the city."

"But you couldn't go huntin' and fishin' in the city," said the deacon slyly.

James' heart gave a bound. What did the disagreeable old man mean? was it possible that he suspected?

"I don't care much for either," he said. "But I'll go and call father."

Presently the squire appeared and invited Deacon Miller into the back room, which was used as the family dining and sitting-room.

"Glad to see, you, deacon," said Mr. Collins, who, having political aspirations, thought it worth while to be polite to his neighbors.

"I ain't so sure of that, squire, when you know what I come about," returned the deacon with a crafty smile.

"No bad news, I hope, deacon."

"Wal, it ain't good news. You know my cow, old Whitey?"

"Well?" interrogated the squire, looking puz-

zled. He had heard nothing as yet of the accident in the pasture.

"She was shot in the face this afternoon—her eyes totally destroyed. I shall have to kill her."

"That's a pity! I sympathize with you, deacon. It must be a great disappointment to you. She was a good milker, wasn't she?"

"Fust-rate! I never had a cow that could beat her. She was worth fifty dollars easy."

"Very likely," said the squire, innocently, quite unaware of the trap which the wily deacon was preparing for him. It will be observed that the deacon, finding he had a case against a rich man, had concluded to raise the value of the cow by five dollars. "Fifty dollars is a considerable loss."

"So 'tis, but I hav'n't got to lose it. The one that shot old Whitey is responsible."

"Who did shoot her?" asked Squire Collins.

"Your boy, James," answered the deacon, slowly.

Squire Collins was very disagreeably surprised. He was not a man who liked to part with money, and he saw how he had been trapped.

"Did you see James shoot the cow?" he demanded sharply.

"N—o; I can't say I did," replied the deacon, cautiously.

"I don't believe he did it then. Did he admit it to you?"

"N—o. I didn't ask him about it."

"Then, Deacon Miller, permit me to say that you have no case against him, and I am not responsible for your unfortunate loss.

"Somebody else saw it!" remarked the deacon triumphantly.

"Who was it?"

"John Downie."

"John Downie! Pooh, he is a mere boy," said the squire, contemptuously.

"He's got as many eyes as you or I, squire," said the deacon, shrewdly.

This was unquestionably true, and the squire felt that he had made a foolish objection.

"John Downie may not tell the truth," he said, angrily.

"I'm willin' it should come before the court," said the deacon. "Wouldn't it be jest as well to ask your boy about it; he's out in the yard."

James was still in the yard. He had half a mind to go away, but was anxious about the deacon's errand. When he heard his father's voice calling him he turned pale.

"Wait for me, Tom," he said. "If you're asked, don't say I did it."

Tom looked disturbed and uneasy, and did not reply.

James entered his father's presence with a perturbed spirit. He stole a glance at the deacon, who sat with his wizened face calm and imperturbable.

"Did you want me, father?" asked James.

"James," said his father, abruptly, "Deacon Miller tells me that some one has shot his cow, old Whitey, this afternoon, and injured her so seriously that she will have to be killed."

"I am sorry to hear it," said James, nervously.

"Do you know who did it?"

"How should I?" asked James, after a pause.

"Wer'n't you out in the pastur' this afternoon?" asked the deacon, pointedly.

"Yes," answered James, "Tom Wyman and I crossed the pasture."

"With guns on your shoulders?"

"Ye—es," admitted James.

"Did you see anything of old Whitey?" continued the deacon, persevering in his pointed interrogations.

"There were some cows there I remember; I suppose old Whitey was among them."

"Did your gun go off while you were in the pasture?"

"Ye—es, I believe it did. It went off accidentally."

"And hit old Whitey?"

"I don't know about that. It may not have hit anything."

"Then you don't know that you hit my cow?"

"I wasn't the only boy in the pasture this afternoon," said James, evasively.

"I know all about that. Tom Wyman was with you."

"Yes, and so was Mark Manning. He was out gunning most all the afternoon. Have you asked him whether he hit the cow?"

"Yes," answered the deacon; "he says he didn't."

"Of course he would say so," sneered James, more confidently. "He's just as likely to have done it as I."

"That's what I thought myself," returned the deacon; "though Mark's a middlin' keerful boy. But I changed my mind."

"Because he denied it?" asked James, with a return of the sneer.

"Not exactly. There was a boy saw it done, and he told me who did it."

"What boy saw it done?" asked James, all his apprehensions reviving.

"John Downie."

This was startling news to James.

"And who does he say did it," he forced himself to ask.

"You!" answered Deacon Miller, laconically.

"I don't believe I did it," said James, wavering.

"He says after you shot the cow, you and Tom Wyman ran away as fast as your legs could carry you," added the deacon, chuckling.

James turned as red as scarlet, but said nothing. It was clear enough that he was guilty, and knew it.

"Deacon Miller," said Squire Collins, "I will look into this matter, and if I find James shot your cow, we will make some arrangement about payment. Understand clearly, however, that I won't pay any fancy price, such as fifty dollars."

"I won't argy the matter now, squire," said the deacon. "Good-evenin'."

"James," said his father, "I won't scold you for a piece of carelessness, but whatever compensation is paid to the deacon must come from your account in the savings' bank."

This was a sad blow to James, he had a hundred and fifty dollars in the bank, and this would make a heavy draft upon it.

He went out into the yard without a word.

"It's all up, Tom," he said. "John Downie has been telling tales about me. The first time I see him I'll give him a licking."

"And serve him right, too, little tell-tale!" said Tom.

Johnny did not expect what was in store for him, but he was soon to be enlightened.

CHAPTER X.

MARK PROTECTS A FRIEND.

SQUIRE COLLINS succeeded in reducing the deacon's claim to thirty-eight dollars, and this sum James was obliged to withdraw from his savings in the bank. He thought it was very hard, as the shooting was merely an accident. He was fond of money, scarcely less so than Deacon Miller himself, and it went to his heart to find himself so much poorer than before.

"It isn't as if I got any fun out of it," he complained to Tom. "It's just money thrown away."

"It is a heavy sum to pay for a trifling mischief," admitted Tom.

"And I shouldn't have had a cent to pay but for John Downie. Why need the boy turn tell tale?"

"It was mean."

"Mean? I should say so. I mean to square up with the fellow. I mean to give him the worst licking he ever had."

Even if Tom disapproved of the intention, he

at any rate did not express any disapproval, but left it to be understood that he considered it perfectly proper.

Three days later the opportunity came. Tom and James were crossing the pasture, which had been the scene of the tragedy, when John, whistling gayly, met them.

"Now's my chance," said James, triumphantly. "There's the sneak that told of me. See how I'll serve him."

John Downie, seeing the boys approaching, nodded his head, saying in a friendly manner, "hello!"

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said James, in a hostile tone, stopping short.

"Yes, it's me. Who did you think it was?" returned John, laughing.

"I've been wanting to meet you, John Downie."

"What for?" asked John. He could not help seeing now that the speaker spoke like an enemy.

"To tell you that you are a sneak and a tell-tale."

"What do you mean by that?" demanded John, beginning himself to be angry.

"You ought to know without asking. Wasn't it you that told about my shooting old Whitey?"

"Well, you did shoot her, didn't you?"

"Suppose I did. You needn't have blurted it out."

"The deacon charged Mark Manning with it. I wasn't going to see him suffer for it when I saw you do it."

"You're a great friend of Mark Manning, it seems," said James, with a sneer.

"Yes, I am; but, even if I hadn't been, I would have told. His mother is poor, and couldn't afford to pay for the cow."

"She'll be poorer yet before long, I'm thinking," said James. "Do you know what I'm going to do to you?"

"Perhaps you'll tell me," said John Downie, calmly.

"I'm going to give you a licking."

"If I'll let you."

James laughed derisively; Johnny was two inches shorter than he, and so far as appearances went was not as strong. In a contest between the two, there was little doubt that James would come out the victor.

"I don't think you'll have much to say in the matter," said James. "Just move out of the way, Tom, and give me a chance at him."

Tom did as requested, and James rushed at

John with an impetuosity born of anger. John prepared to defend himself. The boys were soon grappling, trying to trip each other up. Neither knew much of the science of fighting, and victory naturally came to the stronger. In about two minutes John was on his back, with James kneeling over him, aiming blows at his face.

"I told you I'd give you a licking," said James, closing his teeth, firmly.

"Oh, let him off, James," said Tom. "This ought to satisfy you."

"But it doesn't. I'm going to give him a lesson he'll remember all his life."

James undertook to belabor his fallen opponent, but he had been so preoccupied that he did not notice a boy running towards the scene of conflict, neither did Tom, who had his back turned.

Luckily for John, Mark Manning was on his way to call upon the hermit, when he became an indignant witness of James's brutality. He said nothing, but fairly flew across the pasture till he reached the battle-field. The first intimation James had of his presence was a vigorous grasp of his coat collar, and in an instant he was lying on his back close to his late victim, with Mark standing over him.

"I'm ashamed of you, James Collins," he said,

sternly. "You're a contemptible coward to attack a smaller boy like Johnny."

"Knock him over, Tom," shrieked James, furiously. "I'll give him a licking, too."

"It doesn't look much like it," said Mark, with his knee on James's breast.

"Help, Tom!" called James, struggling once more.

Tom felt obliged to take an active part in the fight, though it was by no means to his taste. He seized Mark by the shoulders, and tried to drag him away from his prostrate friend, but by this time John Downie was on his feet, and ran forward, giving Tom a push which sent him headlong on the other side of James.

"Let me up, you low ruffian!" screamed James.

"Will you promise to behave yourself, then?"

"I will promise nothing."

"Then you can stay here a little longer. What made you attack Johnny?"

"It's none of your business. I'll lick him as often as I please."

"Not while I am around. Johnny, what made him attack you?"

"He said I was a tell-tale, because I told of his shooting the cow."

"And so you are! Let me up, Mark Manning."

"Will you promise?"

"No, I won't."

"Let him up, Mark," said Johnny; "he won't dare to attack me while you are here."

"No, I think not. Get up then, James, and take care how you pitch into Johnny again. Just as sure as you do, you'll have to settle accounts with me."

Released from the pressure that held him down, James rose, angry and humiliated. He would sooner have been worsted by any one than Mark, whom, for some reason not easy to divine, he especially hated.

"You took me at advantage," he said, sullenly, "or you couldn't have thrown me."

"Do you want to try it again?" asked Mark, quietly. "Now we stand face to face, and you have as fair a chance as I."

"I don't care to demean myself by fighting with such a low working boy as you."

"I commend your prudence, James," said Mark, undisturbed by this taunt. "As for being a working boy, I am not ashamed of that."

"You're only a common pegger."

"Very true. I hope to rise higher some time."

"You won't work much longer in my father's shop. I'll have you discharged."

"Just as you please. I think I can earn a living in some other way. Come, Johnny, if James has no further business with you, we may as well go along."

James, appearing to have no wish to resume hostilities, Mark and Johnny walked away.

"You won't hear the last of this very soon," said James, as a farewell shot.

"Do you think he'll get his father to discharge you, Mark?" asked Johnny.

"I think very likely."

"I am very sorry you have got into trouble on my account."

"Don't worry, Johnny. I did right, and am ready to take the consequences."

CHAPTER XI.

MARK IS DISCHARGED.

THE next day Mark, with some misgivings, repaired to the shoe manufactory as usual. He knew he had done a bold thing in defending Johnny against his employer's son, but he never thought of regretting it.

"I would do it again," he said to himself. "Catch me standing by and seeing Johnny whipped by any boy, no matter who he is."

Mark laid aside his hat and coat, and went to his customary bench.

He had been at work fifteen minutes only, when Mr. Waite, the head of the room, entered, and went up to where he was standing.

"Mr. Collins wants to see you, Mark," he said.

"Do you know what for, Mr. Waite?" Mark asked.

"No, Mark, but I hope it is to raise your wages," said Mr. Waite, pleasantly, for he had always liked our hero.

"I am afraid it is something quite different," said Mark, shaking his head.

"No trouble, I hope, Mark?"

"I can tell you better when I return."

Mark put on his coat, and went downstairs to the office.

Squire Collins was seated at a desk, with his spectacles astride his nose. He looked up as Mark entered.

"Mr. Waite tells me you wish to see me, Mr. Collins," said Mark.

"Yes," said the squire, frowning. "I presume you can guess what I want to see you about."

"Perhaps so," answered Mark.

"I understand that you made a violent attack upon my son James in the pasture, yesterday afternoon."

"We did have a little difficulty," Mark admitted.

"Ha! I am glad you confess it. James says you made an unprovoked attack upon him."

"That is not quite true, Squire Collins; I was very much provoked."

"Did my son attack you first?" demanded the squire, sharply.

"No, sir."

"So I thought. Then you have no excuse by your own confession."

"I think I have an excuse."

"I fail to understand what it can be. To me

it appears like a high-handed outrage of which you were guilty."

"I suppose James did not tell you what he was doing when I attacked him?"

"No, I cannot remember that he did. What does that signify?"

"He had John Downie upon the ground, and was beating him brutally."

Squire Collins was somewhat nonplused at this revelation, as James had said nothing about Johnny.

"Well?" he said.

"I ran up, and pulled him off, and prevented him from hurting Johnny."

Squire Collins was rather embarrassed. He saw clearly that his son had been in the wrong, yet he was inclined to stand by him. Moreover, it chafed him that a poor boy should have presumed to interfere with his son, much more use violence towards him.

He drew out his handkerchief and blew his nose, partly to gain time for consideration. At length he spoke.

"My son feels very indignant at your presumption in assaulting him," he said, "and I wonder myself that you didn't see the impropriety of attacking the son of your employer."

"Would you have had me stand by and see Johnny beaten?" asked Mark, indignantly.

"I do not feel disposed to argue with you," said the squire, in a dignified tone. "I feel compelled to take some action in the matter though I regret it. I cannot, of course, retain you in my employ. You are discharged. I have made up your account to date, and here is the sum due you."

"Very well, sir," answered Mark, quietly, though his heart sank within him.

Squire Collins handed him a dollar and thirty-seven cents, and Mark, putting them into his pocket, bowed and withdrew.

He went back to the room where his hat hung, and taking it down, said to his fellow-workmen: "Good-bye, boys, I shan't be with you any longer,"

"Why, Mark, what's the matter?" asked his next neighbor.

"I'm discharged; that's all."

"What for?"

"I'll tell you some other time—not now."

"Mark, I'm really sorry for this," said Mr. Waite, pressing his hand warmly. "I wish you good luck!"

"Thank you, Mr. Waite," answered Mark, his

lip quivering a little. "I will hope for the best."

Mark walked home with a slow step. He dreaded to tell his mother of his discharge, for he knew that she would be still more depressed than himself. Youth is hopeful, but middle age is less sanguine.

"I won't go home at once," thought Mark. "I will go to the wood and see the hermit. He may have some errand for me, and besides, he may be able to give me some advice."

One object which Mark had, however, was to delay breaking the unwelcome news to his mother.

He bent his steps towards the pasture, which he must cross in order to penetrate to the wood by the usual path.

In a few minutes he entered the cabin, the door of which he found open.

The hermit was no longer reclining, but was seated in a rocking-chair—the only article of luxury which the poor dwelling contained.

"Good-morning, sir!" said Mark, "I hope you are better."

"I am much better. But how does it happen that you come here in the morning? I supposed you were at work in the shoe-factory."

"I have lost my place there; I was discharged this morning."

"Ha! how is that?"

Upon this Mark told the story of his encounter with the boys in the pasture.

"I suppose," he concluded, "that James got me discharged in revenge for my interfering with him."

"Then you regret what you did?" inquired the hermit.

"No, I don't," answered Mark, warmly, I "couldn't stand by and see Johnny beaten."

"You are right, and I respect you for what you did."

"It is a grievous thing for me, though," said Mark. "It takes away my income, and I don't see how mother and I are going to live."

"How much were you paid?"

"About three dollars and a half a week. Sometimes I made a little more by over-work."

"You have no occasion to be disturbed. I was about to propose that you should leave your place."

Mark looked surprised.

"I will take you into my own employ," added Anthony. "How long have you been coming to me?"

"A week, sir."

"You may retain five dollars in compensation from the money you hold of mine, and hereafter, as you will give me your whole time, you shall be paid at the rate of a dollar a day—that is, seven dollars a week."

"But, sir, you are overpaying me," protested Mark, who thought this compensation magnificent.

"Be it so. I can afford it. Let me know when you need more money."

"I have still about fifteen dollars."

"After paying yourself for the last week?"

"Yes, sir. Can I do anything for you now?"

"Yes. I feel like taking a walk. That shows I am better. You may come with me, and if I tire myself, I will lean upon your arm in returning."

"With pleasure, sir. I am very glad that you feel better."

"After all," mused the old man, "it is pleasant to have human sympathy. I thought I was able to do without it, but I am more dependent than I supposed."

They walked for half an hour. When they returned to the cabin, the hermit said:

"To-morrow morning I expect a visitor from

the city. I wish you to meet him at the train, and conduct him here. He is a small man, with a sharp look, and will probably be dressed in black. In fact, he is my man of business. You need say nothing of this, however, but let people conjecture as they will."

"And shall I speak of my arrangement with you, sir?"

"You may merely say that I have engaged you to do my errands. I shall not require you again to-day."

CHAPTER XII.

GOOD LUCK AFTER MISFORTUNE.

MARK'S spirits were wonderfully improved when he left the hermit's cabin, and took his way homeward. So far from being injuriously affected by his discharge from the shoe-shop, his income was considerably increased. Not only this, but he had received five dollars for his past week's services over and above what he had been paid for his work in the shop.

"Now," thought he. "I can tell mother without minding it."

But his mother had already heard of it. A neighbor, Mrs. Parker, who rather enjoyed telling bad news, had heard of it through her son, who also worked in the work-shop.

She at once left her work, and hurried over to Mrs. Manning's.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Parker," said the widow, cheerfully. "Take a chair, do."

"Thank you, Mrs. Manning, I can't stop a minute. I left my kitchen at sixes and sevens,

on purpose to condole with you. I declare, it's really too bad."

"What is too bad? I don't understand you?" said Mrs. Manning, perplexed.

"About your son Mark, I mean."

"What has happened to him? Is he hurt?" asked the widow, with a pale face.

"No, no; hasn't he been home?"

"He is at the shoe-shop, of course."

"No, he is not. He was discharged by Squire Collins this morning."

"Discharged? What for?"

"Don't you know? Some quarrel between Mark and James Collins, I believe."

"I am glad he is not hurt."

"But hasn't he been home? I wonder at that."

"I have seen nothing of him since he started for the shop."

"That's strange."

"Poor boy! I suppose he doesn't like to tell me he is discharged," sighed the widow. "It will be a serious thing for us, for I don't know where else he will find work."

"O, something will turn up," said Mrs. Parker, who could bear the misfortunes of her neighbors very cheerfully. "But I must run home, or my dinner will be late."

The more Mrs. Manning thought of Mark's loss of employment, the more troubled she felt. Three dollars and a half a week was not a large sum, but it was more than half their income, and how they were to make it up she could not conjecture. Perhaps she could induce Mark to apologize to James, in which case the squire might be induced to take him back. While her mind was busy with such thoughts, Mark entered the house whistling. His mother was considerably surprised at this evidence of light-heartedness under the circumstances.

He entered the room where his mother was at work.

"Well, mother, is dinner almost ready?" he asked.

"It will be ready soon. But oh, Mark, what is this I hear about your being discharged from the shoe-shop?"

"It is all true, mother, but you needn't worry over it. We shall get along just as well."

"I don't see how. There is no other shop in the village."

"I have another job already, and a better one."

Mrs. Manning opened her eyes in astonishment.

"What can it be?" she asked.

"Old Anthony has hired me to do his errands."

"I am afraid, Mark, that will amount to very little."

"I am to receive five dollars a week."

"Do you really mean this? I thought he was very poor."

"Quite the contrary, mother, but we mustn't say that to others. Let people think he is poor. Here are five dollars which he has paid me for the last week, though I have worked in the shop, and done very little for it. Take it, mother, and use as you need it."

"Will this last, Mark?" asked his mother, almost incredulously.

"I think it will. The hermit seems to have taken a special fancy to me, and he says he can well afford to pay me this sum. I say, mother, suppose I invite him to take dinner with us next Sunday?"

"With all my heart, Mark. He seems to me like a good Providence who has come to our help at this juncture."

"Do you need anything at the store this afternoon?"

"The butter and sugar are out, Mark."

"Give me the five-dollar bill, then, mother, and I will buy some."

Shortly after dinner Mark started for the store. On the way he met several persons who condoled with him on his loss of place. They were surprised to find that Mark looked cheerful, and even gay.

"Yes," he said, "I've retired from the shoe business on a fortune."

"You don't seem to mind it!"

"No, I can stand it well enough, but I pity Squire Collins for losing my valuable services."

"I thought you'd be down in the mouth. You don't seem to care."

"Why should I? Care killed a cat."

Arrived at the store, Mark stepped up to the counter and called for two pounds of sugar and two pounds of butter.

Mr. Palmer, the grocer, had heard of Mark's dismissal, and being a cautious man, inquired:

"Are you going to pay cash?

"Certainly."

"I heard you had lost your place at the shop."

"Yes," answered Mark, smiling, "I discharged Squire Collins."

"It'll be rather hard on you, won't it?"

"I guess I can pay my bills, Mr. Palmer. At any rate I can pay for what I am buying now."

The grocer put up the packages, and was sur-

prised when Mark handed him a five-dollar bill in payment.

"Seems to me you're flush," he said.

"So it seems," answered Mark, but he volunteered no information.

"I can't make out that boy," said the grocer to his assistant, after Mark had gone out. "He looks as if he had got a good place instead of losing it. I wonder if the widder's got any money?"

"Not much, except what Mark brings in."

"They'll be asking credit soon, Enoch. Don't trust them till you've referred to me."

"No, sir, I won't."

On his way home Mark met the cause of his discharge, James Collins, accompanied as usual by his friend, Tom Wyman.

"Hallo!" said James, eying Mark, triumphantly.

"Hallo!"

"Why ain't you at the shop?"

"Probably you know."

"Yes, I do know. You've been discharged."

"I suppose I am indebted to your kindness for that."

"Yes, you are. Perhaps now you will be sorry for your impertinence to me in the pasture."

"When I am I'll tell you so. At present I am glad, and would do the same thing again."

"How do you expect to live?"

"On victuals and drink, thank you."

"If you have money to buy them," supplemented James, with a malicious smile.

"I've got a little money left," and Mark drew out not only his own but the hermit's money. "You see I don't depend on work in the shoe shop."

James was both amazed and annoyed.

"Where did you get that money?" he asked abruptly.

"I am afraid I must leave your curiosity ungratified. I'll tell you, as it may interest you, that I should have resigned my place in the shop at the end of the week, even if you hadn't kindly got me discharged."

So saying, Mark walked away.

"Where do you think he got that money, Tom?" said James.

"Blamed if I know!"

The next morning Mark walked to the depot to meet the morning train.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LITTLE MAN IN BLACK.

WHEN the morning train arrived, Mark was on hand. He watched carefully for the man he was sent to meet. As it happened, the business agent was the last man to leave the train. He stepped upon the platform, and began to look about him.

Mark advanced towards him, and raised his hat, politely.

"Is this Mr. Hardy?" he asked.

The small man regarded him sharply.

"Yes," he answered. "Have you a message for me?"

"Yes, sir. I am to conduct you to Mr. Taylor."

"Just so. How is his health?"

"He has had an attack of rheumatism, but is better."

"No wonder he is sick, living in that out-of-the-way place. Do you know him well?"

"Pretty well, sir. I am in his employ."

"Ha! then he is living a little more as he should do. What is your name?"

"Mark Manning."

"M. M. Just so. Sounds like a fancy name. Is it?"

"No, sir; it's all the name I have," said Mark smiling.

"How long have you been in the employ of Mr. Taylor?"

"Only a little over a week."

"Do you know anything about his history?" demanded Mr. Hardy, with a sharp look of inquiry.

"Yes, sir. He has told me something of it."

"Humph! Then he must have confidence in you. Well, let us be starting. Is it far?"

"Nearly two miles, sir. Perhaps you will be tired."

"In which case you will perhaps kindly carry me on your shoulders," suggested Mr. Hardy, quizzically.

"I am afraid I shouldn't be able to do that," returned Mark, with a smile.

"And yet, I don't believe I weigh much more than you. What is your weight?"

"One hundred and twenty-three pounds."

"And I weigh one hundred and twenty-four. I have one pound the advantage of you."

Mark, who was a stout boy, was rather pleased to learn that he weighed within a pound as much as his companion. I suppose most boys are proud of their size.

They had commenced their walk and Mark found that his new acquaintance was a fast walker.

"Does Mr. Taylor ever have any visitors?" asked the lawyer, for such was his profession.

"Not from the village, sir."

"From any other quarter?" asked Hardy.

"He had a call from his nephew, lately."

"Lyman Taylor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then he has found his uncle's place of concealment. What do you know of the interview?"

Mark gave an account of Lyman's visit, his demand for money, and his threatened violence.

"Did he suppose his uncle had money?" inquired the lawyer, in an anxious tone.

"He did not suppose he had much, but he wanted a part of it, however small."

"Did he succeed in obtaining anything?"

"Mr. Taylor told me to give him five dollars."

"Why you?"

"I had a sum of money belonging to the hermit, in my possession. I used to buy things for him in the village."

"Then you think Lyman went away with the impression that my friend—the hermit, as you call him—had very little money?"

"Yes, sir; I am sure of it."

"Are you under the same impression?"

"No, sir; Mr Taylor has told me that he is moderately rich."

"That shows he has great confidence in you. Don't breathe a word of it, my boy, or this rascally nephew will persecute his uncle, and make his life a burden."

"He will learn nothing from me," said Mark firmly.

"You seem a good trustworthy boy—I think my friend made a good choice of a confidant."

"Thank you, sir."

At length they reached the cabin in the wood. Old Anthony was already outside, waiting for their coming.

"Good morning, my friend," said the lawyer; "the boy tells me you have been sick——"

"Yes, I have had a visit from my old enemy, but I am much better."

"To be sick in such a place!" said the lawyer with a shudder.

"I have not suffered, thanks to Mark—will you come in?"

"Let us rather bring chairs outside, if you are provided with such luxuries. We shall have several matters to discuss."

Mr. Hardy glanced significantly at Mark, who was leaning against a tree, and could of course hear the conversation.

"Mark," said the hermit, "you may go farther away, but return in an hour. This gentleman and myself may have some things to speak of which are private."

"Certainly, sir."

"Well, old friend," Hardy began, "haven't you had enough of this strange existence? you are rich, and can afford all the comforts of life, yet you voluntarily surrender them, and bury yourself in this wilderness. Do you mean to stay here all your life?"

"I did at one time think it probable, now I am beginning to feel a greater interest in life."

"The boy tells me your nephew has found you out?"

"Yes; he came here in quest of money, but he

went away convinced that I was nearly as poor as himself. If he knew the truth I should be in constant danger of robbery, or worse——"

"If you die without a will, is he not your heir?"

"He would be, but I shall make a will. It is partly to give you instructions on this point that I have sent for you."

"You have no one else to leave your money to?"

"A part will go to charitable institutions, a part——"

"Well?"

"To one whom I hold in greater regard than my nephew—to the boy, who guided you hither."

"Indeed! does he know anything of your purpose?"

"Nothing, and need not."

"You have taken a fancy to him?"

"Yes; he is honest, manly, upright, just such a boy as I should have been glad to have for my son. Don't dissuade me, for the thought of doing something for him gives me a new interest in life."

"I shall not dissuade you, Anthony, for I believe the boy to be all that you say. Of course if you had a blood relation who was deserving, I

might make an objection. Has this boy relations?"

"Only a mother, who is mainly dependent upon him. By the way, have you invested the sum paid in lately?"

"No; but I have an application for it, or I should say, for four-fifths of it. Curiously, the applicant lives in this town."

"Who is it?"

"Collins, the shoe manufacturer."

"I am surprised at this. I thought he was rich."

"He has lost money by investments in stocks, and finds himself hard up."

"What does he offer?"

"Seven per cent, secured by a mortgage on his shop."

"Let him have it."

"Are you willing that your name should appear in the matter?"

"No; I shall transfer the sum to Mark, and make you his trustee or guardian."

"I understand. Is he to know of his good fortune?"

"Not at present. The boy was discharged only yesterday from the shop of this Collins," added Anthony, smiling.

"A good joke!" said the lawyer. "And now the boy lends him money. That is returning good for evil."

"Without knowing it."

"Precisely."

CHAPTER XIV.

AN IMPORTANT PROPOSAL.

"THERE is a further sum of a thousand dollars," suggested the lawyer. "What is your pleasure in regard to that?"

"The boy is to have that too. Deposit it in some savings' bank in your own name as his trustee."

"That makes the boy worth five thousand dollars—a large gift."

"Exactly, but I know of no better use for it."

"He is to remain ignorant of this also?"

"For the present, yes."

"Now for your instructions concerning the will. I will note them down, and prepare the document for your signature."

These directions were given, one-half of the hermit's property being left to certain specified charities, the remaining half to Mark Manning.

The lawyer wrote in silence. Then, pausing, he said:

"Will you allow me, in right of our long friendship, to make one suggestion?"

"Surely, John."

"Then let me ask if you are sure that there is no one having a rightful claim upon you, and who ought to be considered in this matter?"

"Do you mean Lyman?"

"By no means. He has forfeited any claim he may once have possessed."

"Then what is your meaning?"

"Are you sure that your daughter left no issue?"

Anthony's brow contracted, not with anger but with pain. The old wound had not healed.

"I never heard of any," he answered, after a pause.

"Yet there may have been a child."

"And if there were?"

"It would be your grandchild," said the lawyer, firmly.

"And his child," said the hermit, bitterly.

"You should not impute that to the child for blame."

"What would you have me do, old friend?"

"Make provision for the child, if there should be one."

"What would you suggest?" asked Anthony, slowly.

"I don't wish to injure the boy; I would only

suggest that charity begins at home. Divide your estate into thirds; give one-third to Mark, one to the child, if there be one, and one to charity."

"I have no objection to that. But suppose there be no child living?"

"Then divide that third between Mark and the charitable societies you have enumerated."

"Wisely counseled, John, but why not give it to you?"

"Because I am moderately rich already, and need nothing more. Then, also, it would work against my interest to find the child. I might turn out to be as wicked and unprincipled as most lawyers are said to be," he concluded, with a smile.

"I have no fear of that. So that is your only objection—"

"It isn't. Give it all to the boy in preference."

"No, let it be as you proposed."

"One thing more. Don't you think it is your duty to ascertain whether you have a grandchild? It may be living in poverty; perhaps in actual want.

"You are right; I should have thought of that before. But what steps would you advise me to take?"

"Send some trusted messenger to the last place where you have information that your daughter lived. Have you tidings of her husband?"

"He died first. Both died of typhoid fever, as I learned."

"Where did they die?"

"At a small place in Indiana—Claremont, I think."

"Then you should send there, and make inquiries. It would be well to go youself, if you could bring yourself to do it."

"But I couldn't."

"Then send a trusted messenger."

"I have none whom I could trust—except that boy."

John Hardy looked thoughtful. He appeared to be pondering something. Finally he said: "Then send him. He is a boy, but he is faithful and discreet. Moreover, I could advise him."

"Let it be so!"

"Can you spare him?"

"Yes, I am quite recovered, and he may not be gone many weeks. If I need help I can easily receive it."

"I would suggest a delay of a week or two, or till the will is drawn up and signed, and some other business attended to."

"I shall be guided entirely by your advice."

"Now shall I leave you some money?"

"No, I have enough to last for some time to come."

"You don't keep it in this cabin, do you? It would be imprudent. You would be exposed to robbery."

"No, I have a place of concealment in the woods. I shall go this afternoon, taking Mark with me, to draw from it. It is my bank."

"The bank of the woods," suggested Hardy, laughing.

"Yes."

Presently Mark returned, and conducted the lawyer back to the station. Without the boy's remarking it, his elderly companion drew him out, weighed him mentally in the balance, and decided that his client was not, after all, rash in confiding in a mere boy.

"He's smart and honest!" was his mental verdict.

At the station, he handed Mark a card containing the address of his office.

"Unless I am much mistaken," he said, "Mr. Taylor will have occasion to send you to my office in the city before long."

"I shall be very glad to come," answered Mark,

gladly. "I don't often get a chance to come to New York."

The lawyer shook hands with Mark, and boarded the train.

Turning to leave the station, Mark encountered the gaze of his two hunting companions, James Collins and Tom Wyman, fixed curiously upon him.

"Who is that old file?" asked James, with his usual want of ceremony.

"A gentleman from New York," answered Mark, briefly.

"What's his name?"

"John Hardy."

"How did you run across him?"

"I didn't; he ran across me."

"How did you get acquainted with him?"

"He asked me to be his guide. I walked about with him."

"O, a tourist! Did he give you anything?"

"No."

"Then all your time and trouble was thrown away," sneered James.

"I don't know about that. He invited me to call at his office when I came to the city."

"That is hardly likely to do you any good. Business doesn't call you to the city very often."

"That is true," said Mark, his temper undisturbed.

"A quarter would have helped you more, especially now that you are out of work."

"I am glad you sympathize with me, James. Perhaps you will ask your father to take me back into the shop?"

"Not after the mean way in which you treated me. I swore I'd come up with you, and I have."

"I hope you'll enjoy your revenge."

"I do, you may be sure of that. If you had minded your own business, it would have been better for you."

"I am not sure about that. It may surprise you, James, to hear that I wouldn't go back to the shop, if your father were to call and ask me to do so."

"That's a likely story!"

"Likely or not, it's true."

"I suppose you have come into a fortune," said James, with a sneer.

This was what had actually happened, but Mark had no more knowledge of his good fortune than James.

Later in the day Mark presented himself at the cabin in the woods.

"I thought you might have an errand for me," he said.

"So I have," returned the hermit. "Take yonder spade and come with me."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HERMIT'S BANK.

MARK was considerably surprised by the order he had received. What was he do with a spade? they were in the woods, and there was no arable land near. However, Mark was sensible enough to understand that it was his duty to obey, not to question.

"All right, sir!" he said, but there was a wonder in his look which old Anthony noticed with a smile. However, he did not immediately throw any light on the mystery.

They walked possibly a quarter of a mile till they reached a comparatively open space near the center of which stood a tall tree.

"We will stop here," said Anthony.

Mark lowered the spade, which he had been carrying on his shoulder, and waited further instructions.

Old Anthony produced a compass to make sure of his bearings, and a tape measure. One end of

this he gave to Mark, saying: "Stand by the tree."

Mark, wondering as much as ever, took his position beside the tree.

"A little more on that side!" was the next direction.

When Mark was placed to suit him, Anthony took the other end of the tape measure, and measured due east sixteen feet.

"Yes," he said musingly, "this must be the spot."

Marking the spot with a stone, he said:

"Bring the spade to me, Mark."

Mark did so.

"I suppose you wonder what I am going to do?" said the hermit with a smile.

"Yes, sir," Mark admitted.

"This is my bank," explained Anthony.

Mark wondered whether the hermit was in his right mind. He stood by curious and attentive, while Anthony began to disturb the soil, throwing up one spadeful of dirt after another.

He continued at his task for ten minutes, and then desisted.

"I get fatigued easily," he said; "here, Mark, take your turn."

Mark took the spade, and continued the exca-

vation. He was young and strong, and bore the fatigue better than his employer. At length he felt the spade striking something hard.

"I have struck something," he said.

"Very well, now proceed more carefully, so as not to break the vessel. Uncover it, and then I will tell you what to do——"

The hole was now about eighteen inches deep. Mark cleared away some of the dirt, and disclosed an earthen pot which appeared to be provided with a cover.

"What shall I do now?" he asked.

"Stoop down, and remove the cover, and take out what you find inside."

Mark got down on his knees, and bending over, accomplished what was asked of him. To his surprise he saw that the bottom of the pot was covered with gold pieces.

"Take them out, and hand them to me," said old Anthony.

"All of them, sir?"

"Yes, I may as well remove them to another place. Besides the balance must be small."

The hermit counted the gold pieces, as they were placed in his hands.

"There are but three hundred and fifty dollars left!" he said.

To Mark this seemed considerable, though it was evident the pot would have contained, if full, many times as much.

"What shall I do with the pot?" asked Mark.

"You can leave it where it is. Any one is welcome to it, now that it is empty. Put the cover on, and some one will one day stumble upon treasure."

Mark filled up the hole, and disposed leaves over it so as to conceal the work that had been done.

"Very well done, Mark! The last time I did all the work myself, but that was before I had the rheumatism. It has stiffened my joints, and weakened me as I find. Now let us go back."

Mark once more shouldered the spade, and the two walked back side by side.

"I may as well explain how I came to deposit my money there," said old Anthony. "I was sensible that it would be dangerous to leave a large sum in my cabin, and it was not convenient or agreeable for me to make visits to the city from time to time to draw money from my agent. I was in the habit of going but once in a year or two, and then bringing with me enough to last me for a considerable period. I could, of course, have hidden my money under the flooring of my

cabin, but that is the very place where burglars would have searched, had they done me the honor to look upon me as a miser, hiding concealed treasures. It was for this reason that I selected a hiding-place so far away from my dwelling. Fearing that I might forget the exact place, I chose a particular tree as a guide, and then measured a distance of sixteen feet due east. Of course there would be no danger of my mistaking the place then."

"Somebody might have seen you digging there, sir."

"True; I used to go early in the morning when no one was likely to be in the wood. Besides, I carefully looked about me before beginning to dig, to make all secure."

"We didn't look about us this afternoon."

"No, it was not necessary. There is no money left, and as for the earthen pot, any one is welcome to it, who will take the trouble to dig for it. I fancy it would hardly repay the labor."

"There is still considerable gold; are you not afraid of being robbed?"

"There is a chance of it. I shall therefore give you half of it to keep for me."

"I am glad you have so much confidence in my honesty, Mr. Taylor. But I hope that no one

will suspect that I have so much money, or I might be attacked."

"Better give the greater part to your mother to lock up in a trunk or bureau drawer."

"I think I will, sir. It seems odd to have you choose me as a banker, Mr. Taylor."

"I don't think I shall have any cause to repent it, Mark."

"Nor I, so far as honesty goes, but I might be robbed."

"We will take our chance of that."

Mark and his employer supposed themselves alone when they were engaged in disinterring the golden treasure, but they were mistaken. Two pairs of very curious eyes watched them from behind a clump of bushes. These eyes belonged to James Collins and Tom Wyman.

They were in the wood with their guns, looking for squirrels, when they saw the approach of Mark and the hermit.

"I wonder what they are going to do," said James. "Mark has got a spade."

"I don't know. Suppose we hide, and then we'll find out."

This proposal struck James favorably, and they concealed themselves behind a clump of

low trees, as already described. With eager eyes they watched the preliminary measurement, and the subsequent excavation.

"The old man's a miser," whispered James. "He's got gold hidden there."

"Just what I think," responded Tom, also in a whisper.

"I wonder if there's much."

"Hush! We'll soon see."

They were not near enough to hear what passed between Mark and Anthony, but they saw the gold coins which the boy passed to his employer. Then they saw the dirt replaced, and the spot made to look as before.

When Mark and Anthony had gone, they emerged from their hiding-place, eager and excited.

"Well," said James, drawing a long breath, "we've found the hermit's secret. He must be a miser. I wonder how much more gold there is in the hole."

"Thousands of dollars, very likely," said Tom, who had a vivid imagination. "You know it doesn't take a very big pile of gold to make a thousand dollars."

"Mark Manning is pretty thick with old Anthony. He trusts him more than I would."

"Mark'll rob him some day. See if he don't."

"I shouldn't wonder. I say, Tom, don't you tell a living soul of what we've seen this afternoon. If Mark steals the money, we can expose him. He little thinks we know his secret."

Tom agreed to this, and the two boys went home. When they next saw Mark, they regarded him with a knowing look that puzzled him.

CHAPTER XVI.

LYMAN TAYLOR GAINS SOME INFORMATION.

WHEN Lyman Taylor left his uncle and returned to the city, he felt that his visit had been a failure. His traveling expenses had amounted to about two dollars, and he only carried back five dollars with him. Added to this, his prospects of remunerative employment were by no means brilliant. To work, indeed, he was an enemy, and always had been.

"Blessed if I know how I'm coming out," he said to himself, ruefully; "if Uncle Anthony had showed any enterprise, he ought to be well off, and able to lend me a helping hand. Instead of which he is settled down in a tumble-down shanty in the woods, and isn't doing any good to anybody."

Lyman resented it as a wrong done to himself that his uncle was not in a condition to help him.

If he were only living in the city now, he might quarter himself upon him. As matters stood, it was out of the question. It made him shudder

to think of becoming a joint tenant of the lonely cabin, with nothing to look to but the homely fare, which no doubt contented his uncle.

"I shall have to shift for myself," he reflected with a sigh; "I always was unlucky. Other fellows are born with a silver spoon in their mouths, and have rich fathers or uncles to provide for them, while I may go to the poorhouse for all the help I am likely to get from Uncle Anthony."

Arrived in New York, however, his prospects rose a little. He met an old acquaintance on the Bowery, and turned into a billiard saloon, where he succeeded in a series of games in raising his small capital to ten dollars.

This gave him a hint of a new way to make a living—a way, as he considered, infinitely preferable to a life of toil. Henceforth he frequented billiard saloons, and occasionally varied his pleasant labors by a game of cards. In spite, however, of his praiseworthy efforts to make an honest livelihood, there came a time when he was reduced to his last quarter of a dollar.

He was sitting moodily in a cheap downtown hotel, when he was addressed by a bearded man dressed in rough miner's costume, a type of man more frequently met in California or Colorado, than in an Atlantic city.

"Have a cigar, stranger?" asked the bearded man socially.

"Thank you; I don't care if I do," said Lyman with alacrity.

"I'm a stranger in York," said the other, "only arrived yesterday. You've got a right smart city here; beats 'Frisco higher'n a kite!"

"Do you come from San Francisco?" asked Lyman with interest.

"I'm from Californy—was up in the mines mostly."

"Did you have much luck?"

"Wal, I made two or three piles, an' lost 'em agin. However, I've got a little left. I've always wanted to see York, and thought I might as well come on and see it before I lost the last."

"I'm glad to meet you," said Lyman, who was speculating as to whether he couldn't make a little something out of his new friend, before his "pile" was wholly reduced in size. "I'm an old Californian myself."

"You don't say so? when was you there?"

Lyman mentioned the time, and the country where he had courted fortune.

"You don't say, stranger?" returned the miner. "Why, I was at that identical place my-

self. I bought a mine—leastways me and my partner did—of an old man, named Taylor."

"Anthony Taylor?" asked Lyman, eagerly.

"That was the old fellow's name. Did you know him, stranger?"

"I should say I did. He is my uncle. Did you—pay much for the claim?"

"We paid five thousand dollars cash down."

Lyman Taylor whistled in amazement.

"Was it worth it?" he added.

"We took out ten thousand dollars, and I heerd that the old man took out as much before selling it to us."

"What month did you buy it?" asked Lyman, breathless.

"Let me see, it was in September. You seem to be interested, stranger?"

"I should say I was. That claim was half mine, and my uncle never gave me a cent of the purchase money."

"Where were you all the time?"

"I left in disgust, for we'd worked a long time without making it pay."

"You left too soon. The old man struck it rich some time early in August, and carried away ten thousand dollars, besides what we gave him. We didn't make so much of a spec, for too much

had been taken out already. Where is your uncle now?"

"Living in the country. I went up to see him two or three weeks since."

"How's he fixed? Did he hang on to his pile?"

"He's hanging on to it now," answered Lyman, with an oath. "He made out he was poor, and sent me off with a beggarly five-dollar note."

"Perhaps he's lost his money."

"More likely he's keeping it out of the way. He ought to give me half he made out of the claim."

"I don't know about that, stranger. You gave up and left, and all he made afterwards, went of right to him."

Lyman Taylor, however, did not regard the matter in that light. Discreetly losing sight of the circumstances under which he left his uncle, carrying off all the gold dust he had then accumulated, he persuaded himself that he had suffered a great wrong in not having shared in the subsequent rich development.

"Just my luck!" he said to himself, moodily.

"If I'd only waited a couple of months I'd have left California a rich man. How was I to guess how the claim was going to pan out. I didn't

think Uncle Anthony would have treated me so meanly. I wonder how much he's got left?"

This was an interesting subject of consideration, but unfortunately, Lyman had no data to go upon; or, rather, what data he had, were not calculated to favor the presumption that his uncle was a rich man.

It did not look very likely that a rich man, or even one moderately well to do, would voluntarily make his home in a poor cabin, like that which old Anthony occupied.

Lyman began to fear that his uncle had managed to lose by bad investments the money he had obtained from the claims, and was really as poor as appearances would seem to indicate.

"Are you livin' in this hotel?" asked the miner.

"I'm not living anywhere in particular," answered Lyman. "Fact is, I'm rather down on my luck. There are no 'piles' to be made in New York."

"I've been there myself, stranger. Here, take this, and pay it back when it's convenient."

Lyman eagerly accepted the twenty-dollar gold piece offered him by his liberal new acquaintance, and leading the way to the bar, they cemented their new-born friendship by a drink in true Cali-

fornia style. He then proposed a game of cards, but the miner declined.

"I never cared much for keerds," he said. "Excuse me! I don't mind playing a game of pool if you're agreeable."

When the two parted, they were sworn friends. Lyman, however, found that his miner friend had all his wits about him, and that the twenty dollar loan was all he was likely to extract from him.

"I must make another visit to that uncle of mine," said Lyman to himself, as he sauntered down the Bowery. "He ought to pay me half the money he got for that claim."

CHAPTER XVII.

ON THE TRAIL OF GOLD.

KEEN on the scent of anything likely to turn to his own advantage, Lyman Taylor arranged the very next day to make a second visit to Pocasset, and find out definitely, if possible, whether his uncle had saved any of the large sum which his claim had yielded him.

He hardly knew what to think. Anthony was not the man to waste money on extravagant living, but then he might have made poor investments, and reduced himself to a pittance. Cases of that kind were common enough in California, as Lyman knew well enough.

He preferred, however, to think that his uncle had turned miser, and was still the possessor of a handsome fortune. In that case, as the only near relative, it ought to come to him some day.

"Let me see," he mused, "how old is Uncle Anthony! Fifty-nine!" he resumed, after a mental calculation. "That isn't very old, but he looks a good deal older. He is about played out

—a physical wreck," he reflected, complacently, "and may not live a year.

"In that damp cabin it could not be expected. Of course it's his own lookout. If he chooses to live there, I don't see that it's any of my business. I ought to come to a friendly understanding with him, and get him to recognize me as his heir. I dare say he's got his money hidden away in some out of the way place. It would be a sorry joke if he should die, and it shouldn't be found."

Lyman shuddered uneasily, as he thought of this contingency.

"He ought to place his money in charge of some competent manager," he resumed. "I'd take care of it myself, and save him all business cares, if he'd let me."

Lyman did not appreciate the absurdity of this plan. Few persons think themselves unfit to be trusted with money. What he thought of his own honesty can only be conjectured. Probably he did not regard himself with the eyes of those who knew him.

Such thoughts were passing through the mind of the hermit's nephew, as he was traveling from New York to Pocasset. Arrived at the depot, he set out for the village at a brisk pace.

Presently he espied in advance of him a couple

of boys, whose figures looked familiar. It did not take him long to recall the two boys he had met in the pasture on his former visit. Of course they were James and Tom.

"Just the ones I want to see," he said to himself. "I may get some news from them."

He quickened his pace, and soon overtook them.

"Good-morning, young gentlemen!" he said, urbanely. "I believe we have met before."

The boys turned around. They, too, recognized him.

"Yes, sir," answered James. "You are old Anthony's nephew."

"The same! I am glad you remember me. Have you seen or heard of my uncle lately?"

"Yes; we saw him yesterday in the wood."

"Has he recovered from his rheumatic attack?"

"I guess so," said Tom. "He is looking pretty well now."

"I came down to inquire his condition. I am his only relative, and though he is prejudiced against me, I can't help feeling anxious about his health. Can you tell me anything about him?"

"He has that boy, Mark Manning, about him all the time."

"What can be the boy's object in keeping company with a poor old man, who has no way of rewarding him?"

"I am not so sure about that," said James.

"About what?" asked Lyman, quickly.

"About his being poor."

"Have you any reason to think my uncle has money?" asked Lyman, eagerly, fixing a sharp glance of inquiry on the speaker.

James looked at Tom, as if to consult him about the propriety of telling what he knew.

"As I am his nephew and only relation, and —heir," continued Lyman, "you can freely tell me anything you have found out."

"Would you?" asked James, turning to his companion.

"I don't see why not," returned Tom.

"Then," said James, who rather enjoyed the prospect of telling the story, "I'll tell you what I saw the other day—that is, Tom and I."

"Yes, yes, what did you see?" interrupted Lyman, eagerly.

"We were out in the woods about a quarter of a mile from the hermit's cabin, when we all at once heard voices. Slipping behind a tree we saw old Anthony and Mark coming along. Mark had a spade over his shoulder. We wondered

what it all meant, and so kept hidden. Well, the two came up to a big tree, and then measured with a tape measure to a place about a rod distant. Then old Anthony took the spade and began to dig. But I guess he got tired, for pretty soon he gave the spade to Mark, and got him to dig."

"Well?" ejaculated Lyman, who was listening with intense interest.

"Pretty soon he struck something hard. It turned out to be an earthen pot with a cover."

"Did they take it up?"

"No; but Mark took off the cover, and then took out, oh, such a lot of gold pieces."

"Just what I thought!" exclaimed Lyman, in excitement. "I was sure my uncle kept his money hidden in the ground somewhere. Do you know how much money he took out of the jar?"

"There must have been hundreds of dollars—maybe a thousand."

"And what then?"

"The cover was put on again, and then Mark filled up the hole, and covered it with leaves, so that nobody would think the ground had been disturbed, then they went away."

"That shows there must be more money there, don't you think so?"

"Of course, or they wouldn't have taken so much trouble to cover it up again," answered James, readily.

"You are right. I see you are sharp. What a fine detective you would make!"

James looked pleased at this compliment, and it inclined him in favor of the appreciative stranger.

"Do you think," asked Lyman, after a pause, "you could find the spot again?"

"Yes, I guess so. Why?"

"I should like to go there."

"But," objected James, cautiously, "what would you do if you found it?"

"I would dig down and find the jar."

"But you would have no right to do that; the money belongs to old Anthony."

"Who is my uncle. But you are mistaken. I don't want to take it. I want to see if the gold is still there."

"Why shouldn't it be?"

"Because," answered Lyman, with a lucky thought, "the boy knows where it is. What is to prevent his going there by himself and carrying off all there is. My uncle would have no proof that it was he."

"I never thought of that," said James, quickly. "It would be just like Mark."

"Do you think he is honest?"

"I wouldn't answer for him. He is a poor boy."

"Exactly, and the gold would be a great temptation. As the legal heir of Uncle Anthony, I think I ought to look into the matter. Suppose my uncle should die, wouldn't this Mark get the money, even if he hasn't done it already, and no one would be the wiser?"

"Of course!" James readily assented. "What do you want us to do?"

"Lead me to the place, and let me see for myself if the money is still there."

"Shall we, Tom?"

"I think it would be only fair."

"Then come along. I'll get a spade from the house as we pass."

The spade was obtained, and the three set out for the wood.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LYMAN'S DISAPPOINTMENT.

JAMES was not without his share of curiosity, and he was strongly desirous of seeing with his own eyes the pot of gold, and so learning how rich the hermit was.

Prejudiced as he was against Mark, he did not really believe the boy would appropriate money that did not belong to him, though it would have been a satisfaction to him to find that his enemy was in a scrape.

"That boy, Mark, seems to be an artful young rascal," Lyman Taylor remarked, as they were walking along together.

"He is all of that," said James, emphatically.

"My uncle is old, and his mind is weak. He is very likely to be influenced by a sharp, unprincipled boy."

"It's lucky you came down here to watch him."

"That depends on whether I am able to put a spoke in his wheel."

"Do you know whether your uncle has much money?"

"I don't know, positively, but I have heard he was very successful in California."

"If he is rich, I shouldn't think he would live in such a tumble down cabin," said Tom.

"Perhaps he has become a miser. His burying money looks like it."

They entered the wood, and as the boys knew their way all over it, they were able to go straight to the tree.

"It was from this tree that old Anthony measured," said James.

"Can you tell in what direction?" inquired Lyman, anxiously.

"This way, I am sure."

"Do you know how far?"

"Not exactly, but we can tell by seeing where the ground has been disturbed."

Lyman Taylor took the spade and began to dig vigorously. Such hard work was not generally to his taste, but now he was spurred by a powerful motive.

He would not have been sorry, now that he had obtained the information he required, if the boys had left him to work alone. But this they had no intention of doing. They were very curi-

ous to see the treasure unearthed, and ascertain how much there was.

At length, the spade struck the earthen pot.

"I've touched it!" exclaimed Lyman, triumphantly.

He worked with redoubled energy, and soon laid bare the buried vessel.

The boys drew near, eagerly, and looked into the hole.

Lyman threw himself down upon his knees, and removed the cover of the jar. No sooner had he done so, when he uttered a fierce cry of disappointment.

"Boys," he said, looking up with haggard face, "there's nothing there!"

"No gold in the jar?" asked James, with a blank look.

"Not a particle. Are you sure there was any left?"

"We couldn't see, but it stands to reason that it would not have been so carefully covered up unless there had been some left."

"You are right there. Now, what has become of it?"

"Can Mark have taken it?" said James, turning to Tom.

"I don't know," answered Tom, doubtfully.

"That's just what happened. I'd like to wring the young rascal's neck," said Lyman, fiercely.

"What are you going to do about it?" asked James, curiously.

"I say, boys, it's pretty hard luck," complained Lyman, "to see yourself robbed by an artful young scoundrel. He's just taken in Uncle Anthony by his artful ways, and is laying a trap for his money."

"I see now," said James, quickly. "That's what he meant by not caring about losing his place in my father's shop."

"I'll go and warn my uncle against him," said Lyman. "Boys, will you show me the shortest way to the cabin?"

"Certainly, with pleasure."

Pleased with the idea of getting Mark into a scrape, James guided the disappointed nephew to the hermit's dwelling.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HERMIT RECEIVES A CALL.

OLD Anthony was sitting in his doorway, thoughtfully smoking a pipe, when, chancing to lift his eyes, his gaze fell upon the figure of his nephew advancing towards the cabin. It was a surprise, and not a pleasant one. He could not divine Lyman's object in making this second visit.

"How are you getting along, Uncle Anthony?" inquired Lyman, in a conciliatory tone.

"Have you come all the way from New York to ask me that question?" said the hermit, dryly.

"Well, not altogether. Still, I wanted to know whether you were better."

"I have got over my rheumatic attack," said Anthony, shortly.

"I'm very glad. At your age it must be uncomfortable to be sick—especially in such a place. Can't I persuade you to come to New York, and take comfortable lodgings?"

"Why should you desire it? Perhaps you would propose to live with me?"

"And if I did, being your only relative, it would be natural enough. With your means——"

"What do you know of my means?" demanded the hermit, sharply.

"I have reason to think you are better off than your position would indicate," announced Lyman, watching the effect of the assertion on his uncle.

"What reason?" inquired Anthony,

"Well, I know you were very successful in California—after I left you. You struck it rich, made a great deal of money, and then sold the claim for a good round sum."

Anthony's countenance did not change, though the communication was by no means a welcome one.

"How much of this money do you think I have now?" he asked, at length.

"I don't know."

"And I don't propose to tell you."

"I know you have some of it!"

"Very possibly. I cannot live for nothing."

"And I know where you keep it," added Lyman, provoked by his uncle's manner.

"Indeed!"

"But I can't commend your prudence in putting your money where it is so likely to be found —and taken."

"Be a little more explicit. Let me know just what you mean."

"Burying money in the ground is not very wise."

Old Anthony was taken by surprise, and showed it.

"So you know this? Where did you obtain the information?" he asked.

"From some one who saw you and the boy, Mark, digging for it."

"Well," said the old man, quietly, "I know of no better place. People are honest round here, and it will not be taken."

"I agree with you there, Uncle Anthony. It won't be taken for a very good reason. There is none there. The jar is empty."

"How do you know this, Lyman?" demanded the hermit, with a searching look.

Lyman hesitated, but it seemed necessary to tell the truth.

"Because, when I learned that you had been so imprudent as to let the boy into your secret, I concluded at once that he would take advantage of his knowledge, and rob you. I therefore un-

covered the place, and found it as I suspected. The jar is empty."

Old Anthony betrayed no excitement on hearing this.

"It is quite true," he said, quietly. "All the gold has been taken."

"You knew this?"

"Certainly. I took the last gold piece myself. Having no occasion for the jar, I left it there. You are certainly very kind to take so much interest in the safety of my property, but it is needless. I am still able to take care of what money I have left."

Lyman's face fell. He began to suspect that this was only too true.

CHAPTER XX.

HOW LYMAN SUCCEEDED.

"I AM afraid you misjudge me, Uncle Anthony," said Lyman, after a pause, during which he reflected that his best course was, if possible, to make a favorable impression upon the relative who might be in possession of considerable property. "I am afraid that you are prejudiced against me."

"You must admit that I have reason," said his uncle, dryly.

"It is true," replied Lyman, with an engaging frankness; "I did not treat you well in California."

"I should say not. You disappeared, carrying away two thousand dollars, leaving me penniless."

"Of course I was wrong. Still you had the claim, out of which you made a good deal more within a short time."

"When you left me," said the hermit, quietly.

"it looked as if it were worthless. That it proved otherwise, was my good fortune."

"I won't argue the matter, Uncle Anthony. I was young and heedless."

"Wicked would be a better word."

"And I have had bad luck; I am almost penniless now. If you would be willing to help me——"

"To what extent do you want help?" asked Anthony, abruptly.

"If you could lend me fifty dollars, it would set me on my feet."

"And in a week or two you would be coming back for more."

"Upon my honor——"

"How much honor have you?" asked his uncle, contemptuously. "Would you like to go West?"

"Yes."

"Then I will give you the means of getting there."

Lyman was under the impression that his uncle proposed to hand him a sum of money, out of which he decided to buy a western ticket if it suited his convenience; Uncle Anthony would be none the wiser.

"Yes, uncle, if you will give me a hundred

dollars, I will go to Chicago, and seek there a chance to make an honest livelihood."

"Very well."

Old Anthony took out a memorandum book, tore a leaf from it, and wrote a few lines, which he handed to his nephew.

"What is this?" asked Lyman, suspiciously.

"It is an order on a friend of mine in New York for a Chicago railroad ticket."

"And the money?"

"He will give you an order on a firm in Chicago for the balance of the money, which will be paid you there."

Lyman's countenance fell. It was clear that the trick which he intended to play on his uncle would be impossible.

"It seems to me," he said, "it would be better to give me the money at once."

"I don't think so."

"I hope you have no suspicions of my good faith."

"I won't express my opinion on that subject. I will only say that the arrangement I have suggested suits me best."

"Well," said Lyman, slowly, "I will try to win your good opinion. I am afraid I have not money enough to get back to the city."

He had over ten dollars in his pocket at that moment, but it struck him that he had a good excuse for securing a little more.

The hermit smiled contemptuously.

"Then suppose I had had no money to give you —how would you have got back to the city? Perhaps you meant to stay with me?"

"I will, Uncle Anthony, if you desire it."

"Thank you. I won't trouble you."

"I should have had to walk back. But, uncle, I can't leave you without a word of warning."

"Well?"

"That boy, Mark, I am sure is scheming to rob you."

"What do you know of Mark?"

"I know the reputation he bears in the town. I know he has been discharged from the shoe-shop."

"Who told you?"

"Two boys whom I met. One is the son of Mark's employer."

"I know the boys you mean. They dislike Mark, but I prefer him to them."

A noise was heard at the door, and Mark entered.

He looked in surprise at the visitor, whom he instantly recognized.

"You see, Mark," said the hermit, "my nephew has kindly called to see me again. He felt anxious about my health."

"I feel relieved to find you so much better, uncle," said Lyman, by no means abashed at the hermit's ironical words.

"It is the more creditable to him, this solicitude, because he had only money enough to pay his fare one way. Mark, you may give him five dollars."

"Very well, sir,"

Mark drew a five-dollar gold piece from his pocket, and handed it to Lyman.

"Does Mark carry all your money, uncle?" asked Lyman.

"Not quite all."

"I hope he won't take a fancy to travel at your expense."

Mark's face flushed indignantly, but he left old Anthony to answer for him.

"I have perfect confidence in Mark," he said.

"Thank you, sir," Mark responded, gratefully.

"Have you anything for me to do this morning?" the boy asked.

"No; I will give you a list of articles which you may bring me from the village to-morrow."

"Then I will return, as I have some work to do at home."

"Very well."

"I will go along with you, Mark," said Lyman, suddenly.

"If you wish," answered Mark, but he would rather have gone alone.

"Good-by, Uncle Anthony. It may be a good while before I see you again. If you need me at any time, write or telegraph."

"I will bear it in mind," said the old man, dryly.

Mark and the dutiful nephew left the cabin together.

"You've got a soft place, youngster," Lyman began.

"I have an easy place, and a kind employer," said Mark.

"So you carry the old man's money, hey?"

"Some of it," answered Mark, eying his companion, suspicously.

"Don't looked scared, boy. I'm not going to rob you. I only want to ask you a few questions. How much money did you and he take from that buried jar the other day?"

"Who told you about it?" asked Mark, in surprise.

"O, I know more about the old man's affairs than you suppose," chuckled Lyman.

"I can't tell you."

"Won't, you mean," returned Lyman, scowling.

"I have no right to do so."

"Look here, boy, do you know that I am my uncle's heir?"

"He never told me so."

"Then I tell you so."

"I hear you, sir."

"I'll tell you something else. I believe you are trying to worm yourself into my uncle's confidence, so as to rob him—and me."

"Your thinking so doesn't make it so," said Mark, angrily.

"I warn you that you had better think twice before you play such a dangerous game. You have a bad reputation in the village."

"Who told you so?" demanded Mark, indignantly.

"Two of your companions."

"James Collins and Tom Wyman probably!" said Mark, contemptuously.

"I know you were discharged from your place in the shoe shop?"

"But for no good reason."

"That's what you say. How much money of my uncle's have you in your pocket?"

"That I don't choose to tell," said Mark, firmly.

Lyman felt a strong inclination to take the money by force, but prudence restrained him. In that case, the order which he carried would not be honored, and he would probably lose more than he would gain.

Mark was apprehensive of an attack, and it was with joy that he caught sight a little way in advance of James and Tom, whom under other circumstances he would not have cared to meet.

"You will now have company," he said, "and I will hurry along."

Lyman did not oppose his purpose, and joined the two boys.

CHAPTER XXI.

ALL ABOARD FOR NEW YORK.

THE next day Mark found a letter in the post-office directed to Anthony Taylor. According to custom it appeared in a written list containing the letters of those who had no boxes.

Mark called for it.

"Who is Anthony Taylor?" asked Tom Wyman, who happened to be attending the office for his father.

"Old Anthony," as the boys call him.

"I wonder if there's money in it!" said Tom, holding up the letter, and trying to peep inside.

"That's none of our business," answered Mark.

"Oh, you're mighty virtuous!" sneered Tom. "If there is any money, I'll bet you'll get a share of it."

"I get no money except my wages."

"How much does he pay you?"

"I would rather not tell," returned Mark, with

a smile. "You might try to get my place away."

"As if I would work for an old tramp like the hermit!" exclaimed Tom, disdainfully. "I suppose he pays you about a dollar a week."

"That's better than doing nothing, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's better for you. I don't want your place. I shall go to the city when my school days are over."

"I wish you good luck, Tom, whenever you do," said Mark, good-naturedly. "I must hurry along with my letter."

"A letter for you, Mr. Taylor," announced Mark, as he entered the cabin.

"From John Hardy," said the hermit, as he scanned the address.

He opened the letter and read as follows:

"My Dear Old Friend: Your will is drafted and ready for signature. You had better come up to the city, and sign it. I know your reluctance to leave your forest home, but it will occur to you at once that your signature must be witnessed, and though witnesses might be found in Pocasset, it would involve a degree of publicity which I presume you would wish to avoid. Here I can easily get it witnessed by my clerks.

"I suggest that you bring the boy, Mark, with

you, as he may be of service to you. Moreover, I think it is high time that we spoke to him of the mission on which you propose to send him.

"Your worthy nephew, Lyman, called upon me to-day with your letter. He wished me to furnish him with the money needed for his ticket, but I thought it better to send a clerk to purchase the ticket, and see him fairly off. He has just returned, and reports that Lyman is on the way to Chicago. I think you showed considerable shrewdness in securing his removal from this neighborhood. He may return, to be sure, but the chances are that he will spend all the money, and find himself stranded in Chicago. If this compels him to work for a living, no harm will result.

"Your friend as ever.

"JOHN HARDY."

Old Anthony laid down the letter thoughtfully. He was reluctant to go to New York, but saw that it was necessary. His reluctance was diminished by the prospect of having Mark's company.

"Mark," he said, "can you go to New York with me to-morrow?"

Mark stared at his employer in amazement. The proposal was very unexpected.

"I am obliged to go up on business," explained the hermit. I wish I could delegate it to you, but I must attend to it myself. It is so long

since I have been in a crowd, that I believe I shall need some one to take care of me."

"I shall be very happy to accompany you, sir," said Mark, with alacrity.

"At what time does the morning train leave the station?"

"Nine o'clock, sir."

"Then meet me there at fifteen minutes before the hour."

"All right, sir."

"When shall we return?" asked Mark, after a pause.

"When does the afternoon train leave the city?"

"At three o'clock."

"We will return then."

"I only wanted to tell my mother when to expect me."

It must be admitted that old Anthony looked like an antediluvian figure in his old-fashioned coat, with a short waist and long tails, as he stood on the platform the next morning waiting for the train. Two or three of the village boys laughed rudely, but the hermit was buried in thought, and took no notice of them. Mark, himself, thought his employer looked queer, but he saw nothing to laugh at.

"Are you going to town with old Anthony?" asked one of the boys.

"Yes," answered Mark.

"People will take him for your grandfather."

"I don't mind."

"He looks like a rusty old tramp. His coat looks as if it was made in the year one."

"He has a right to consult his own taste. He has been kind to me, and I don't care to listen to any rude remarks."

"You may buy two tickets, Mark," said the hermit.

Mark did so.

Just as he was leaving the ticket-window, his former employer, Mr. Collins, the shoe manufacturer, took his place.

"Are you going to the city?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Who goes with you?"

"Mr. Taylor."

"Mr. Taylor?"

"The—the hermit."

"Oh!" returned the manufacturer, arching his brows, "are you working for him?"

"Yes, sir."

"You might have been working for me, if you had behaved yourself."

"I am satisfied with the change," answered Mark.

"That boy is impertinent," soliloquized the village magnate. "He can't get much pay from a pauper. However, it serves him right. Of course, it is only pride that makes him profess to be satisfied."

Mark would have been surprised, had he known that Mr. Collins was going up to the city to call upon the person with whom the hermit had business. Such was the fact, however. Mr. Collins had applied to Mr. Hardy for a sum of four thousand dollars, mortgaging therefor, his large shoe manufactory, which had originally cost double this sum.

As Mr. Hardy told old Anthony, he had ventured into Wall Street, and the losses he had incurred there, had forced him to raise money in this way.

To-day had been fixed by Mr. Hardy for the execution of the papers, and the transfer of the sum required. Twelve o'clock was the hour appointed by Mr. Hardy, for his business with the manufacturer.

"What on earth can carry that old scarecrow up to New York?" thought Mr. Collins, as he eyed curiously old Anthony, who, with Mark,

was seated a few steps in front of him, in the same car. "I suppose he has a pension from some source, and is going to collect it."

It may be remarked that James Collins had never communicated to his father the discovery made in the forest, connected with the pot of gold.

CHAPTER XXII.

IN AN OFFICE ON BROADWAY.

MR. HARDY'S office was in a large, high building, on Broadway. It was the fifth floor, but there was an elevator constantly running, which made it nearly as easy of access as if it had been on the first.

Mark had never before ridden in an elevator, and he enjoyed the novelty of it. From a directory, near the entrance, they ascertained that Mr. Hardy occupied office No. 55, and this was easily found.

"Welcome to New York," said the agent, advancing cordially, to greet his visitors. "Good morning, Mark. So you have piloted my old friend safely."

"I think he has piloted me, sir. I know very little of the city."

"I have not been here for five years," said Anthony, reflectively. "I am unused to the noise, and it confuses me."

"I like it," said Mark.

"You are young, and enjoy new and busy scenes," said Mr. Hardy. "Would you like to travel?"

"Very much, sir."

"Perhaps you may some time."

"I am afraid it will be a long time before I am able."

"Possibly not."

Mark, however, did not detect any special significance in these words.

"You may sit down here, and read a morning paper, Mark," said the agent, "while I transact a little business with Mr. Taylor."

The two entered an inner office, where Mr. Hardy produced an official-looking document, to which he called the attention of the hermit.

"Read it over," he said, "and see if it meets your views."

"Precisely," answered Anthony, after he had taken the time necessary to read it.

"Then it may as well be signed at once."

Mr. Hardy summoned three clerks from the outer office, and in their presence as witnesses the will was signed.

"I suppose I may as well leave the document with you, John," said Anthony.

"It will be as well. Now, about the other

matter. It seems to me you may as well send Mark at once in search of some clue to the possible existence of a grandchild. Before doing so, however, may I suggest something?"

"Certainly."

"I don't like the idea of your living in that lonely cabin. Why can't you seek a home in the house of your young secretary? Has he a good mother?"

"She is a very worthy woman."

"Has she a room for you?"

"I think so."

"What do you think of my proposal?"

"I have been thinking of such a change myself. For the first time in five years I am beginning to find my cabin home monotonous."

"I am glad to hear it. You will be much better off in a home where you can be taken care of."

"I will attend to the matter without delay on my return."

"So far, so good. Now, let me call in Mark, and speak to him of our plan."

Mark, at the summons, entered the back office.

"Mark," said Mr. Hardy, "we want you to take a journey."

"I shall be very glad to do so, sir."

"It will be a long one."

"The longer the better," answered Mark, his eyes sparkling.

"Your first stopping place will be Chicago."

The boy's eyes sparkled with excitement.

"I should like nothing better," he said.

"The commission will be to trace out Mr. Taylor's daughter, and find out whether she left a child. Necessary instructions will be given in writing."

"Do you think I am old enough?" asked Mark, excited but doubtful whether he was competent for the duty assigned him.

"Discretion is more needful than age," answered Mr. Hardy. "Perhaps an older messenger would be better, but as my friend wishes to avoid publicity, he is disposed to try you. Would your mother be willing to have you go?"

"I think so, sir, but I hate to leave her alone."

"Mr. Taylor proposes to board with her while you are absent, if you think she would be willing to receive him."

"I know she would be glad to secure such a boarder," answered Mark, quickly; "with that help she would be able to get along very well."

"Then that matter is probably settled. Now a few words to guide you in your quest."

These words need not be repeated here, as in following Mark's journey it will be understood what they were.

Their business concluded, Mark and the hermit left the office and descended to the ground floor.

They were just leaving the building when Squire Collins entered.

He arched his brows in surprise. "You here?" he said, addressing Mark.

"Yes, sir."

"On what errand?"

Mark was privately of opinion that he had as much right to ask the manufacturer's business as the latter his, but he answered: "Mr. Taylor had business here."

Squire Collins smiled contemptuously. It did not strike him that the hermit's business was likely to be of any great moment. So people often deceive themselves and assume a superiority to which they have little claim.

"Probably old Anthony has just been paid his pension," he thought, as he left them, and made his way to the elevator.

He, too, ascended to the fifth floor, and leaving it there went to John Hardy's office.

"Good morning, Mr. Collins," said Hardy. He knew nothing of the manufacturer's home title. "I shall be at leisure in five minutes."

The five minutes passed.

"Now I am at your service," he said.

"Have you decided to let me have the money, Mr. Hardy?" asked the manufacturer, trying to conceal his anxiety.

"Taking as security a mortgage on your manufactory?"

"Yes, sir."

"I think I can let you have it."

Squire Collins looked much relieved.

"You will find the security ample," he said. "The building is worth double the sum I am borrowing."

"Is it well insured?"

"Yes, sir."

"The policies of insurance must be placed in my hands."

"Of course."

"I have to take all precautions, as the money is not mine, but belongs to a boy for whom I am trustee."

"I see."

Squire Collins had no curiosity as to the name of the boy referred to. He would have been very

much amazed had he been told that it was the very boy whom he had discharged from his employment only a short time previous. For that matter, Mark would have been quite as much surprised.

In the course of half an hour the proper papers had been made out, a check for four thousand dollars handed to Squire Collins, and the shoe manufacturer left the office in as good spirits as Mark had done half an hour before.

"By the way," remarked the Squire at his supper table that evening, "I met two persons from Pocasset in the city to-day."

"Who were they?" asked James.

"Old Anthony and Mark Manning."

"What could have taken them to the city?"

"I presume Anthony receives a small pension from some source, and went up to collect it."

"I think it very likely," said James, thinking of what he had seen in the forest. "I presume it isn't much."

"Probably not."

"I shouldn't think he'd have gone to the expense of taking Mark."

"The old man looked dazed. I presume he doesn't feel safe in going alone."

"Very likely Mark asked to go. He's fastened

himself on the old man, and means to get all he can out of him."

It is wonderful how prejudice colors our opinion of others.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MARK'S MISSION.

THREE days later, two things puzzled the good people of Pocasset. One was the removal of old Anthony from his lonely cabin to the small but comfortable cottage of Mrs. Manning. It was voted by the village people a very sensible move, but they were at a loss to understand how the recluse had been persuaded to change his mode of life. It was generally supposed that he was quite poor, but the two or three dollars a week he would be able to pay the widow would be a help. A room on the second floor was appropriated to old Anthony, where he spent much of his time. Every day, however, he wandered off to the woods, which had been his residence for several years. Though he said little, he was soon convinced that he had bettered himself by his removal. Mrs. Manning provided plain, well-cooked meals, which were far more attractive than the extemporized lunches with which he had thus far been content.

There was another circumstance, however, that equally puzzled the good people of the village. This was the disappearance of Mark. He was no longer seen walking about the streets, and many were the inquiries made of his mother as to where he had gone. At the request of old Anthony she answered very indefinitely. She could not tell just where Mark was, but he was employed. He would probably be home in a few weeks.

Among those whose curiosity was most keen were James Collius and Tom Wyman.

"Where do you think Mark has gone?" said James one day, throwing away a half-smoked cigarette.

"I don't know any more than the man in the moon," answered Tom. "I asked his mother the other day when I met her in the street, but I couldn't get any satisfaction out of her."

"Perhaps he has gone to the city in search of a place."

"I shouldn't wonder."

"He can't get anything to do here. Father won't take him back into the shop."

"He was at work for old Anthony."

"That couldn't amount to much. The hermit is as poor as Job's turkey."

"Do you know this? How about the gold we saw?"

"It was all he had," said James, who was in the habit of jumping at conclusions. "My father says he gets a small pension from some person in the city. Some rich relative, I suppose, is taking care of him. Do you know, Tom, I should be glad to come across Mark blacking boots, or selling papers in the city?"

"Why?"

"He is so mighty independent—poor and proud—that I believe he actually thinks himself as good as you or I."

"He is pretty pert, that's a fact."

"If he were only humble, and showed that he knew his place, I'd get father to take him back into the shop. It's his own fault that he got discharged."

"It's a good thing for his mother having a boarder, as Mark isn't able to help her."

"Pooh! what does that amount to? He probably pays two or three dollars a week. However, I suppose that's a good deal to her."

Mark would have been amused, but not surprised, if he could have heard this conversation between his two old companions. At present, however, he had other things to occupy his attention.

He had already reached Chicago and was staying there a day or two before going farther.

His ultimate destination was Claremont, in Indiana, the place where the daughter of the hermit was understood to have died. It was about seventy-five miles from Chicago, and could be reached in three hours. Mark felt that he could do no better in his brief stay in Chicago than walk about, and make himself familiar with the principal streets and avenues, and gain some knowledge of the western metropolis.

He kept his eyes wide open, and noticed all that came in his way. Everywhere throngs of busy wayfarers, and not one of whom he had ever seen before. It seemed strange to him, for in Pocasset he knew everybody.

"The world is larger than I thought," he reflected, "and there are more people in it. I wish I could see one familiar face."

He had hardly formulated the wish when his glance rested on a form that seemed strangely familiar. It was a man, tall, slender, with a slouching gait.

"That must be Lyman Taylor," he decided, with a natural start of astonishment.

It was indeed the man whom he had last seen in the woods at Pocasset. He had not thought

to meet him, though he remembered now to have heard that Lyman had been sent to the West by his uncle.

On the whole, Mark was not as much pleased as he expected to see this familiar face. He did not care to be recognized, as Lyman might have his curiosity excited, and make him trouble.

Suddenly Lyman turned, and his glance fell upon Mark. The boy lowered his head, and walked on without notice. Lyman did not recognize him, though he was vaguely conscious of something familiar in Mark's appearance. But before he left New York, Mark had been provided with a new check traveling suit, and a hat of a different style from the one he was accustomed to wear.

Moreover, Lyman had no thought of meeting the country boy in a western city. So he turned his glance in a different direction, and descended the steps that led to a basement pool and billiard room.

"I would follow him down there, if I dared risk discovery," thought Mark. "However, it is none of my business what he does, as long as he doesn't annoy his uncle."

Lyman Taylor would have been glad to see Mark, or any one else representing his uncle.

The sum he had brought away with him had nearly all melted away, and his prospects were by no means brilliant. The thought of engaging in any employment by which he might earn an honest and independent livelihood was by no means attractive to him.

In the afternoon of the second day Mark started by train for Claremont, and arrived at the Claremont Hotel in time for supper.

He found Claremont to be a fair sized town, containing perhaps four thousand inhabitants. It seemed to be growing rapidly, like most western towns favorably situated. After a comfortable supper he bethought himself of whom he could make inquiries as to the object of his journey.

As he sat in the office, a tall man, with long hair, and a look of speculation in his eyes accosted him.

"Have you just arrived in town, young man?"

"Yes, sir," answered Mark.

"Are you calculatin' to settle here?"

"No, sir; I am only here on a little business."

"Drummer, I reckon!"

"No, sir; I do not represent any business house."

"You do look rather young for a drummer, but you said you were travelin' on business."

"My business is of a different nature, sir."

"Just so! if I can help you, I will. I am Colonel Enoch Tarbox, well known hereabouts."

"Thank you for your offer. If you will allow me, I will ask you one or two questions."

"Go ahead, young man; I'm ready to give you any information in my power."

"I am in search of a family named Ransom, who lived here some years ago."

"John Ransom?"

"Yes, sir."

"You won't find him; he's dead."

"So I have heard. Did you know him or his wife?"

"I've drank with John Ransom many a time at this very bar. He was rather fond of a social glass."

"Did you know his wife?"

"I've seen her often. She's dead too. They both died of a fever."

"I suppose they had no children," said Mark, putting the question anxiously.

"Let me see," said the colonel slowly, evidently searching his memory; "yes, I believe there was a child, a little boy."

"Is he alive?" asked Mark eagerly.

"There you've got me, stranger. Children

ain't much in my line. I never heerd of Ransom's child dying. I reckon it left town though."

"Where could I get any information about it, do you think?"

Colonel Tarbox reflected.

"I reckon you'd better go to Mrs. Finn; she was intimate with Mrs. Ransom. She lives in the little white cottage alongside of the Presbyterian church."

"Thank you, Colonel Tarbox; I am much indebted to you for what you have told me."

"Don't mention it. Won't you take a drink?"

This kind offer Mark declined rather to the colonel's dissatisfaction. He decided to call upon Mrs. Finn the next day.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHAT MARK DISCOVERED.

As the clock on the Presbyterian church struck nine, Mark stood knocking at the door of the little cottage hard by.

The door was opened by a comely woman of middle age, who, not recognizing Mark, looked at him inquiringly.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

"My name is Mark Manning," said Mark, introducing himself. "I have been directed to you as likely to give me some information about Mrs. Ransom, who—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mrs. Finn, not waiting for Mark to finish his sentence. "Poor dear! I know all about her. Come in, do!"

She led the way into the neat sitting-room, where she invited Mark to be seated. Then she changed parts with Mark and began to ask questions.

"Are you related to Mrs. Ransom?" she asked.

"No," answered Mark, "but I come from one who is."

"Alas, it is too late! The poor woman is dead."

"I know that, but did she leave a child?"

"Yes, a little boy. She sat great store by little Jack."

"And what has become of him?" asked Mark, eagerly.

"That is more than I can tell. A tall gentleman—I don't rightly know his name—appeared at the funeral, said he was a relation, and took off little Jack to St. Louis, I think."

"A tall gentleman—a relation!" repeated Mark, surprised. "What was his appearance?"

Mark was destined to be surprised, for Mrs. Finn's description tallied exactly with the appearance of Lyman Taylor. This was a surprising discovery. Mark was sharp enough to guess that Lyman's object was to remove from his path any rival claimant to his uncle's property, supposing him to possess any.

"I think I know who you mean," he said, after a pause.

"Was it really a relation of Mrs. Ransom?"

"If it was the one I suppose, it was her cousin."

"I am glad to hear it. Then poor Jack was taken care of."

"I am not sure about that," said Mark, gravely. "Though a relative, he is a selfish, bad man, and I am afraid he meant the poor boy no good."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Finn, startled, "you don't think he would murder the innocent child?"

"No, I don't think that, but I think he wanted to put him where his grandfather would never find him."

"Is it his grandfather you come from, then?"

"Yes; he does not even know of his grandchild's existence, but if I find him, the boy will never need any other protector. Can you tell me anything of Mrs. Ransom—of her husband?"

"Poor Mrs. Ransom was a sweet woman, who deserved a better fate. As for her husband, he was a drunkard, and a loafer. Those are hard words, but he deserved them both. They hadn't much money, but what there was he spent for liquor at the hotel yonder. More than once his poor wife and little child wouldn't have had any breakfast if I hadn't taken some over."

And warm-hearted Mrs. Finn wiped away a tear.

"Did her husband treat her very badly? Did he beat her?"

"I am afraid he did when he was very far gone,

but, poor thing! she never complained. She always looked sad, though, and she didn't enjoy her life very much."

"Did she ever speak of her father?"

"Once only. She told me she had ill-treated him, and been a disobedient daughter. I think it was in marrying Ransom."

"Did she ever write to him?"

"She told me she did once, but never received an answer. 'He won't forgive me,' she said, with a sigh, and never wrote again."

"I am sure he did not receive the letter, Mrs. Finn. If he had, he would have noticed it."

"I hope so; at any rate she was sadder than ever when no letter came to her in return. Finally, her husband took sick with a fever. Bad as he had been to her, she nursed him like a devoted wife as she was. But she couldn't save him. Hardly was he dead, when she, too, caught sick, and in the end she died. While she was sick I took little Jack home, for fear he would catch the fever too. I was thinking of adopting him after his mother's death, when the man I spoke of called and took away the boy, saying he would provide for him."

"And that was—how many years ago?"

"Nearly six, I think."

"And I suppose you have neither seen nor heard of him since?"

Mrs. Finn shook her head.

"Where does little Jack's grandfather live?" she asked.

"Near New York."

"Is he a rich man?"

"Moderately rich. He is well able to take care of his grandson, if he could find him."

"I wish I could tell you more, I am sure," said Mrs. Finn heartily. "If the poor boy yet lives, Heaven knows what his condition may be. If you could find the man that took him away——"

"I can," answered Mark.

"Then why don't you go to him, and ask him where to find the child?"

"Because it is against his interests to have him found. He and the little boy are the only heirs to the grandfather's property. His uncle has good reason to dislike him, and if the boy is found, Lyman Taylor will get nothing, I feel sure."

"Well, well! What wickedness there is in the world!" ejaculated Mrs. Finn. "What will you do?"

"I don't know. I shall have to consider."

"Did the grandfather send you out here?"

"Yes."

"Excuse my remarking that you are very young to undertake such a responsible task."

"I think so myself, Mrs. Finn," Mark answered, modestly. "But it so happened that he hadn't much choice. I shall do my best, and if I can't find him, I shall go home and report, and advise Mr. Taylor to send an older and more competent person."

"You won't be offended by what I said?"

"Certainly not. Any one would think as you do. Is there any other information you can give me, Mrs. Finn?"

Mrs. Finn shook her head.

"I am afraid not," she said.

"You are sure the boy was carried to St. Louis?"

"Quite certain."

"I might go to St. Louis, but without any clue I am afraid I should stand little chance of succeeding."

"You might advertise."

"That is true," said Mark. "Indeed, it appears to be the only thing I can do. How old would the boy be now?"

"About eight years old, I think."

"Thank you."

Mark took out a small memorandum book, and

noted down the small amount of information he had obtained.

It did not appear to be much, and yet it was of great importance. He had ascertained that Mrs. Ransom had left a child, and moreover that Lyman Taylor had been aware of the fact, and had conspired to keep its existence from old Anthony.

"Does he know where it is now?" Mark asked himself.

Mark was inclined to think not. Shortly after the boy was carried away, Lyman had gone East, got into trouble, and served a term of some years in a prison.

During those years, probably the boy had drifted out of his knowledge. Doubtless he could furnish a clue, but for obvious reasons, it would not do to apply to him.

"I am very much obliged to you for your information," said Mark, as he rose to go.

"You are heartily welcome, sir. Would you mind writing me, if you find out anything about poor Jack?"

"I will certainly do so, Mrs. Finn. I shall lose no time in going to St. Louis."

"Heaven speed you, and bring you success," said Mrs. Finn, fervently.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE LITTLE MATCH BOY.

"MATCHES! Matches! Here's your nice matches!" was heard in a shrill treble, proceeding from a little boy on Clark Street, in Chicago.

He looked thin and pale, and it was easy to see the poor little fellow was poorly fed, as well as ill-clad.

"Only five cents a package!" the little fellow continued to cry; and he looked wistfully in the faces of those who passed him, hoping for a possible purchaser.

"Clear out of my way there, you brat!" said a rough voice. "Do you want to take up the whole sidewalk?"

The boy shrank timidly, as the man who had addressed him swaggered by. He would not have dared to resent the rudeness, but another did. It was a stout, and healthy-looking woman, with a large basket on her arm, whose heart warmed towards the poor little match boy, sent out so early to earn his livelihood.

"You ought to be ashamed to speak to the poor boy that way!" she said, warmly.

"Mind your business, woman!" retorted Lyman Taylor, for it was he whose rough speech had been quoted.

"I always do," said the woman. "It's my business to speak my mind to such brutes as you!"

Lyman vented his wrath in a volley of oaths, for his language was by no means choice, when his anger was excited. He might have been more prudent, if he had known that a policeman was just behind.

"Stop that, my man, unless you want me to take you in!" said the burly officer.

Lyman Taylor turned sharply round, but quailed when he saw the officer.

"This woman has insulted me," he said, sullenly.

"I just spoke to him for abusin' that poor match boy," said the good woman.

"I heard it all," said the officer. "Move on, my man, and behave yourself, if you don't want to get into trouble."

Such a scene was sure to attract a small crowd. One kind-hearted man drew out a dime from his pocket and handed it to the match boy.

"Here, my lad," he said; "take this, and I hope it'll do you good."

"Here are two boxes of matches for you, sir."

"No, keep them. I give you the money."

"Here's another dime," said a young man, of literary aspect. He was a reporter on one of the Chicago daily papers, who, in spite of the cases of poverty and privation that came under his notice every day, still preserved a warm and sympathetic heart.

Then a lady followed his example, and in the end, the match boy had received a sum much larger than the value of his small stock in trade.

Lyman Taylor's rudeness had proved to him a piece of good luck, in opening the hearts of those who would otherwise have passed him by without notice.

Smiling with pleasure at the child's good fortune, the good woman who had resented Lyman's rudeness so warmly, went on her way. If all had hearts as warm, there would be little misery or suffering in the world. It is often those who have little, that are most ready to help others poorer than themselves. I must not omit to add, that among the contributors to the little match-boy's fund was the policeman, who placed a

nickel in his hands, with the admonition to "brace up and be a good boy!" This was true charity, for out of his salary the officer had to support a large family of his own, and therefore had very few nickels to spare. He was bluff of aspect, but kind of heart.

"It's a shame to send out such a child on the streets," he said to himself. "Think of my Rob having to lead such a life!"

The policeman looked sober, for, should anything happen to him, as in his exposed life might very well happen, he knew not what would be the fate of his little ones. They might be as badly off as the poor match boy.

The little match boy's thin face showed signs of satisfaction as he looked at the collection of small coins which had been given him by the pitying crowd. He turned into an alleyway and counted it. It amounted to seventy-six cents. This was a phenomenal sum for the small merchant. And the best of it was, he had his stock of merchandise left.

A thought entered the little boy's mind, prompted by his craving for food.

"Would it be wrong for me to take a little of this money and buy me some dinner?" he said to himself. "I am *so* hungry. Aunt Peggy only

gave me a slice of bread for breakfast, and it's most two o'clock now."

Only a slice of bread, and he had been walking about for hours, trying to sell matches. The fruit of all his labor was the sale of two boxes at five cents each. But he had seventy-six cents besides, and they were his. They had not been given to Aunt Peggy, but to him. So, at least, he reasoned. Not that he meant to keep it all himself. He intended to give the greater part to the woman who was the only guardian he knew, but he thought he had a right to use fifteen cents for himself. It wasn't much, but he knew a place—a cheap place—where for this sum he could get a cup of coffee and a plate of beefsteak. At the thought of this delicious repast the match boy's mouth watered. When had he eaten meat? Three days ago Peggy had given him a bone to pick. There was not much on it, but when he had got through with it there was none at all.

Johnny could not resist the temptation. He suspended sales, and made his way to a cheap restaurant on a side street. With eager steps he entered, and sat down at a wooden table from which nearly all the paint had been worn off, and scanned the bill of fare.

It seemed to him that there was nothing better than the dish he had already mentally selected.

A greasy looking waiter approached, and said sharply, "What'll you have, kid?"

"Cup o' coffee an' plate of beefsteak!" answered Johnny.

"Sure yer got money enough to pay for it?"

"I wouldn't have asked for it if I hadn't," said Johnny, emboldened by his unusual wealth.

"All right, then! Sometimes chaps come in and order their dinner, and skip off before it comes time to pay."

The greasy looking waiter went to the back of the room, and soon returned with the banquet Johnny ordered.

He set it down with a jerk.

CHAPTER XXVI.

LUCK FAVORS LYMAN.

No patron of Delmonico's probably ever contemplated his sumptuous meal with more satisfaction than shone in the little match-boy's eyes, as he gazed with watering mouth at the overdone, tough-looking steak, the mashed potato, the three slices of stale bread and dab of butter, which furnished the solid material of his meal. A cup of muddy coffee completed the bill of fare. After all, appetite is the best sauce, and Johnny had appetite enough to make his meal seem palatable.

Johnny did not stand upon ceremony, but "pitched in." It is not an elegant expression, but it describes accurately the energy with which the boy disposed of his dinner. Ten minutes sufficed for its entire disappearance. There was not even a crumb left.

"That was bully!" said Johnny to himself, with a sigh of supreme satisfaction. "I wish I could have such a lay out every day."

But he evidently thought this was unattainable happiness. He did not even think of reserving from his little fund, enough to provide a similar feast on the following day—partly because he was an honest little fellow, and partly because he stood in fear of the burly woman whom he called Aunt Peggy.

"I wouldn't have Aunt Peggy know I've been here for something," he thought.

There seemed little chance of it, but, as ill luck would have it, as he was emerging from the restaurant, a boy he knew passed with a blacking-box on his shoulder.

"What have you been doin' in there?" asked Tim Roach. "Been havin' yer dinner?"

"I just got a little to eat," answered Johnny, ill at ease.

"Got any more money?"

"A little."

"Then just treat a feller, won't yer? I'll do as much for you to-morrer."

"I can't, Tim, the money isn't mine."

"You won't, you mean."

"I would if the money belonged to me."

"Does Peggy know yer went in there?" asked Tim, slyly.

"Don't tell her, Tim! I was *so* hungry."

"Then treat!"

"I can't, Tim!"

"All right!" replied Tim, nodding. "I'll let Peggy know how you spend her money."

Poor Johnny! These last words alarmed him terribly.

Lyman Taylor's stock of money was getting low. He was not a good financial manager. But even if he had been, he would not have been able long to live without work. When his stock of ready money was reduced to five dollars, he began to consider anxiously where he could obtain a further supply. It is not strange that his thoughts should have reverted to his uncle.

"I wonder if Uncle Anthony is well fixed or not. He got considerable money in California, but may have lost it. The old man is close-mouthed, and I can't worm the secret out of him. If I had any hold on him——" continued Lyman, thoughtfully.

He sauntered along till he came to a pool-room, connected with a cheap hotel, of the kind he was in the habit of frequenting. No one chanced to be playing, and by way of filling up the time he took up a St. Louis paper, and ran his eye listlessly over it.

But at one place in the advertising columns,

his listlessness suddenly vanished, and his face assumed a look of eager interest. This was the advertisement that attracted his attention:

"INFORMATION WANTED.—Any one who can give information concerning a child named Jack Ransom, who was brought to St. Louis a little more than five years since, is desired to communicate with Mark Manning, at the Planters' Hotel. The boy, if living, is now seven or eight years of age."

"Well, I'll be——hanged!" ejaculated Lyman Taylor. "How, in the name of all that's mysterious, has my uncle got hold of a clue to little Jack's existence?

"So he's sent that country cub—Mark Manning—out to investigate. He must be crazy to trust a green boy, who has always lived in the country.

"But what beats me, is how he learned so much. I did take the boy to St. Louis, and placed him with an old woman, who very likely has starved or beaten him to death by this time. But suppose she hasn't," continued Lyman, after a pause.

"Suppose the child is still living. If I could only find out, then I would have the hold on my uncle that I require. I would kidnap the boy,

and not part with him under a good round sum.

Lyman's face brightened, but only for an instant. It was a capital scheme, but how was he to get hold of the boy? How did he know if he were living?

He would have been amazed if he had known that he had seen the boy that very day, selling matches in the streets.

There was one thing, however, that seemed clear to Lyman. His uncle must still have a comfortable property, or he would not be able to send a messenger to St. Louis in search of his lost grandson.

"The old man may have twenty thousand dollars, for aught I know," reflected Lyman; "and doesn't spend the income of half that as he lives now. No doubt that country boy has an inkling of it, and is planning to get hold of it. That boy is foxy, and knows what he is about, I'll be bound."

This estimate did not exactly agree with the one Lyman had recently expressed of Mark, but he did not think it necessary to be consistent.

"Twenty thousand dollars!" he repeated, and his nephew almost starving here in Chicago, Oh, it was a cunning scheme to buy me off for a pal-

try sum, and give a free field to that boy. That's a pretty way for a man to treat his only living relation.

"But who could have put it into his head that his grandson was alive? I presume the little beggar has kicked the bucket before this. If I only could get hold of him, I would make the old man pay handsomely for his return."

The chances, however, did not seem very flattering, and Lyman had no money to expend in searching for the boy, apart from the doubt whether he was still living. Gradually a new idea came to him. He might pick up some boy who would answer the purpose, whom he could palm off on his uncle as his grandson. True, it would be raising up a rival heir; but he was thoroughly persuaded that in no case did he himself stand any chance of succeeding to his uncle's property.

"It will be worth something," he muttered, "to cut out that country boy. All I have to do, is to find a boy who is without relatives, and I can concoct some story that will impose upon Uncle Anthony. That little match boy, for instance! Why wouldn't he do?"

Lyman became so excited by his castle building, that he determined to lose no time in carry-

ing out his design. He left the tavern, and retraced his steps to the place where he had encountered the match boy. Johnny, after eating his dinner, had resumed his business, and was within a block of the same place offering his wares to the passers by.

He was a little worried by Tim's threat to expose his extravagant dinner to the old woman with whom he lived, but persistently refused to buy off his persecutor.

"I say, little boy, what's your name?"

Johnny tnrned round at these words, and recognized in the man addressing him, the one with whom he had already had trouble. His face showed the fear which he not unnaturally felt.

"Don't be frightened, my boy!" said Lyman, with an ingratiating smile. "I am afraid I was rough to you this morning. Don't mind it! I was worried about my business affairs, and didn't mean what I said. Shake hands, and let us be friends."

With rather a bewildered look, Johnny allowed Lyman to take his small, thin hand, and looked perplexed.

"Come, you don't harbor no malice, my lad, do you?" said Lyman with a smile.

"No—o," answered Johnny, doubtfully.

"The fact is, I feel an interest in you, my boy. You look like a little cousin of mine that I haven't seen since he was a baby."

Johnny was more and more puzzled. The neglected little match boy was not used to such attention.

"Did you ever live in St. Louis?" asked Lyman, at a venture.

"Yes," answered the match boy.

Lyman opened his eyes in surprise. He had not expected such an answer. Even then he did not suspect that Chance had led him to the very boy whom he desired to meet.

"Have you any father or mother?" he asked.

"No sir."

"Good!"

Johnny could not understand why his questioner should be pleased to hear that he was an orphan. Lyman Taylor seemed to him a very incomprehensible man. He felt rather uncomfortable in his presence, and hoped the man would go away, and leave him to attend to his business.

"Who do you live with, then, sonny?" was Lyman's next question.

"With my aunt."

"What is your aunt's name?"

"I always call her Aunt Peggy."

"WHAT?" exclaimed Lyman, in a tone that made the little match boy jump. "You live with an old woman named Peggy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she your aunt?"

"I suppose so. I always call her Aunt Peggy."

"It's the very boy!" was Lyman's exulting thought. "I'm in luck at last. Lyman, old man, your plans are going to be realized."

"Were you ever called Jack?" he asked, anxiously.

"Yes; that's what Aunt Peggy calls me. Other people call me Johnny."

"My boy," said Lyman, fervently, "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you. I am sure now you are my little cousin. Where does Peggy live?"

The match boy named the place—a poor street in a poor neighborhood.

"Take me there at once. I want to see your Aunt Peggy."

"But Peggy will be mad if I don't stay and sell matches, sir."

"Come along; I will make it right with her."

Lyman took the little boy's hand, and the two turned off Clark Street, and went in pursuit of Peggy.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OLD PEGGY.

TIM ROACH was not only selfish, but liked to make mischief. He resolved to be revenged upon Johnny for declining to "treat" him to a dinner, and having plenty of time on his hands, took pains to seek out the humble home tenanted by old Peggy.

It was on the third floor of a tall, shabby brick house, not far from the Chicago and Alton depot. Tim had been there before, and didn't require directions. He ascended the rickety staircase, nearly treading on two dirty faced children belonging to a neighbor of Peggy's, who were playing on the landing. As a third child, older, made her appearance, Tim stopped long enough to inquire, "Is Peggy at home?"

"Yes," answered the girl. "She's home, but, oh my, ain't she tight!"

"That's nothin' new," said Tim, composedly.

He knocked at Peggy's door, and receiving no answer, opened it.

The old woman had thrown herself on a truckle bed at one corner of the room, and was breathing noisily with her eyes half closed.

"Is it you, Johnny!" she asked, without turning her head.

"No, it's me!"

"Who's me?"

"Tim Roach."

"What do you want?"

"I've just seed Johnny, Peggy."

"Has he sold many matches? Where is he?"

"I seed him in an eatin' house. He was eatin' a bully dinner."

"What!" exclaimed Peggy, now thoroughly roused, raising herself on her elbow. "What's that you say, Tim Roach?"

Tim, quite enjoying the commotion he had raised, repeated his information.

"So he's spendin' my money in fillin' his stomach, the little wretch!" exclaimed Peggy. "That's why he brings home so little money. The ungrateful little imp that I've slaved and slaved for these last six years, takin' advantage of a poor old woman when her back's turned! Where was it, Tim, dear?"

Tim mentioned the restaurant.

"And what was he eatin', Tim?"

"He ordered a cup o' coffee and beefsteak—I don't know what else he had."

"I'll learn him to chate and decave me!" said the old woman, angrily. "He only brought home twenty-five cents yesterday, and I takin' care of him, and buyin' him close and vittles."

"I guess he buys some dinner every day," said Tim.

"And I never to suspect it! Tim, dear, you're a good boy to come and tell me. You wouldn't treat your best friend that way?"

"No, I wouldn't!" said Tim, virtuously. "What are you goin' to do to him, Peggy?"

"Where's my stick, Tim? Do you see it anywhere?"

"No, I don't," answered Tim, after a search.

"Some of them children downstairs must have carried it off."

"I can buy you a cane for ten cents."

"And where would the ten cents come from I would like to know. I'll bate him wid my fists, the ongrateful young kid."

"What are you goin' to give me for tellin' you, Peggy?" asked Tim.

"I'll give you a penny the next time I see you," said Peggy, vaguely.

"That isn't enough. Give me a nickel to buy a glass of beer?"

"I haven't got it, Tim. I wish I had, for I'm awful dhry myself."

"I wouldn't have come all the way to tell you if I'd know'd that," said Tim, discontentedly.

Just then a noise was heard on the stairs, and Tim, opening the door wider, looked out.

"Here's Johnny now, Peggy!" he said in excitement.

"Come home the middle of the afternoon, too, the young rascal!" ejaculated the old woman. "I'll fix him!"

"So here you are, you young——," commenced Peggy, as Johnny made his appearance, but the threat with which she was about to conclude, died in the utterance, when she saw that Johnny was closely followed by a tall man of middle age.

"Who are you, sir?" she asked irritably, "and what brings you here? If you're the agent, I haven't got any money for you."

"Don't you remember me, Peggy?" asked Lyman, sinking with rare courage into a chair which cracked under his weight.

"No, sir, I don't. If I had my glasses, perhaps——"

"I see you've got company, Peggy," continued

Lyman, with a significant look at Tim. "I would like to speak to you alone. It'll be to your advantage, mind," he added, detecting a suspicious look on the old woman's face. "Just send the two boys out to play, and we'll speak together."

"First, hand over what money you've got, Jack," said Peggy. "I ain't goin' to have you wastin' it outside. Let me see your matches! How many boxes did you sell?"

"Five," answered Johnny.

"Only five!" exclaimed the old woman, holding up her hands. "You were playin' in the strates, I'll be bound!"

"No, I wasn't, Aunt Peggy. I tried to sell more, but——"

"Oh, yes, I understand! And you'd done so well you thought you'd buy yourself a dinner off my money. Come here and let me shake you!"

"Tim told you!" said the little boy, with a reproachful look at his betrayer.

"Yes, he told me, and he was a good bye for doin' it."

"He said he'd tell if I didn't buy him some, too."

"Is that threu?" asked Peggy.

"Hark to him!" said Tim, with virtuous indignation. "It's a lie, and he knows it."

"Did you spend all the money, Jack?" demanded Peggy. "If you did——"

"But I didn't, Aunt Peggy. Some good people gave me some money, and——"

"It was for me, then. How dared you spind it?"

"I've brought most of it home, Peggy. See here!" and Johnny took out a handful of small silver coins and pennies, and poured them into the old woman's lap.

Peggy was agreeably surprised. She saw that there was nearly a dollar, much more than Johnny generally brought home, and it put her in a good humor.

"You've done well, Jack!" she said. "I won't grudge the money you spent for a bit of dinner. Now go out and play wid Tim."

"I don't want to play with him. He told on me."

"My lad," said Lyman, "can't you bring a bottle of beer for your good aunt and myself. Here's money; you can bring back the change."

"You go, Jack, for the gentleman," said Peggy, quite restored to good humor. "I don't mind sayin' that my throat is just parched with bein' so dhry."

Johnny went out, and soon returned, for he had not far to go. In spite of his company being so unwelcome, Tim went and returned with him.

"Won't you give me a little, Peggy," he asked.

"No, I won't. You wanted Jack to trate you on my money. Now clear out, and never let me see your ugly face here ag'in."

"That's the thanks I get for tellin' you!" complained Tim. "And after runnin' myself out of breath, too!"

"Clear out wid you! And you, Jack, go back and see if you can't sell some more matches. It's only the middle of the afternoon, and there's plenty of time before sunset to sell half-a-dozen boxes."

Johnny obeyed, not unwillingly, for he was not partial to home, nor did he enjoy Peggy's company. Tim accompanied him, but Johnny, gentle as he was, refused to have anything to say to him. Tim felt that he was badly treated. Johnny turned his back on him, and Peggy had utterly failed to acknowledge the service he had rendered her. Tim was of opinion that it was a cold world, and that there was little encouragement to be virtuous.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LYMAN'S PLAN.

"HERE'S your health, Peggy!" said Lyman, emptying his glass.

"Thank you, sir!" said Peggy, following his example. "You're very kind, I'm sure, and I ought to remember you, but my memory ain't what it was."

"So you don't remember me?"

"I can't remimber that I iver set eyes on your face before, sir."

"Then you don't remember the man that brought you a small child to take care of near six years ago?"

"Shure it's himself!" ejaculated the old woman, peering curiously into Lyman's face. "I only saw you twice, and that's why I forgot. Shure it was a cruel thrick you played upon a poor old woman, when you gave her a baby to take care of, and then, five long years never sent her even a penny. It's hundreds and hundreds

of dollars I've spent on little Jack, and he no kin to me!"

"No doubt he has been brought up in the lap of luxury! He looks like it," said Lyman with an amused smile.

"And now you've come to pay me all I spent on the child?" insinuated Peggy.

"Well, not just yet. The fact is, Peggy, unavoidable circumstances prevented my communicating with you, and the same won't admit of my paying over the hundreds of dollars that Jack has cost you."

"Then what do you want of me?" inquired the old woman disappointed.

"I think I can see a way by which both of us can make something out of the boy. By the way, it strikes me just at present that he is supporting you instead of you taking care of him."

"He only brings in a few pennies a day," said Peggy. "Shure it's hardly enough to pay his salt."

"Then Jack must be immoderately fond of salt. However, I'll let you into a secret. His grandfather is looking for him."

"His grandfather?"

"Yes; no doubt you are surprised that Jack possesses a grandfather, but that is a fact. His

grandfather is my uncle, and what is more to the purpose he has a fair property."

"And little Jack is goin' to be rich!" gasped Peggy in amazement.

"Well, I don't know! That depends on whether we allow his grandfather to find him."

"And why shouldn't he? Wouldn't he be givin' a big reward?"

"That is where you come to the point, my good Peggy. If he will make it worth our while, we may restore him to the old gentleman."

"And how much would he be givin', d'ye think?" asked Peggy, her bead-like eyes sparkling with greed.

"I shouldn't wonder, Peggy, if you might get a hundred dollars out of it."

"A hundred dollars—after my takin' care of the boy ever since he was a babby. Now you're jokin'."

"Well, you see, his grandfather isn't a rich man—" explained Lyman, fearing he had unduly raised the expectations of the old woman.

"You said he was!" retorted Peggy sharply.

"I said he had a comfortable property—for a country town. That means a few thousand dollars."

"He sha'n't have him for such a thrifle," snapped Peggy.

"The police might take him from you, without your getting a cent."

"How would they know, unless you told 'em?" asked Peggy suspiciously.

"Look here, Peggy!" said Lyman in a conciliatory tone. "We've got to stand by each other in this thing. Just leave the matter in my hands, and I'll manage it as well as I can. I'll get as much money from the old gentleman as I can."

"And you'll give me half?"

"Of course—that is, after necessary expenses are paid."

"And what am I to do then?"

"Nothing, except to stay here, and see that nobody gets hold of Jack. Does he know who he is?"

"He thinks I'm his aunt."

"And is proud of the connection, no doubt," said Lyman, who could not restrain his tendency to sarcasm. "Well, perhaps that is as well. Don't let any one know that it is not true. We can keep quiet till the time comes to make it known. Now, I'll leave you, and take the first step by writing to my uncle. Good afternoon, Peggy! I'll call again in a day or two."

"Couldn't you leave me a dollar or two before you go?" whined Peggy. "Me health is very poor, and I can't work, and it's only a few pennies the boy brings in."

"You're better off than I am," said Lyman curtly, "for I am out of employment and I have no boy to bring me in pennies. I don't know but I'd better take Jack at once, and then you won't have to take care of him."

"I'll kape him," said the old woman hurriedly —for she had no wish to lose the income the match boy brought in, small as it was. "I'll kape him, for he's used to me life, and he's happier here."

"Just as you like, Peggy!" returned Lyman with a smile at the success of his stratagem. "I'd help you if I could, but I'm almost at the bottom of my purse as it is. I'll see you again in a day or two, and report progress.

"I've done a good day's work," reflected Lyman, as he picked his way downstairs, nearly slipping on a piece of orange peel on one of the steps. "It was a piece of good luck, my finding Jack so soon after seeing that St. Louis paper—but I must write an effective letter to my uncle."

Lyman went to the Sherman House, and entering the writing-room procured a sheet of note paper, and penned the following note:

"CHICAGO, *September* 7, 18—.

"MY DEAR UNCLE:

"I am afraid you are feeling anxious about me, and I will therefore relieve your affectionate solicitude, by saying that I am well in health, but low—very low in pocket. It costs more to live in Chicago than in Pocasset, and the sum of money with which you provided me is nearly gone. As I am a little afraid this hint won't be sufficient to open your heart, let me add that I can make it worth your while to be generous.

"It has come to my knowledge that you have sent out Mark Manning in search of your grandson. How you came to suspect that my cousin left a boy I can't imagine, but I don't mind telling you that you are correct. She did leave a boy, whose name is Jack Ransom. He is now about eight years of age. I know where he is and can lay my hands upon him at any moment. Whether I will or not depends on how you propose to deal with me. Of course it isn't to my interest that the boy should be found, as outside of him I am your natural and legal heir. I know that Mark Manning is scheming to get possession of your property when you are gone, but I am sure you wouldn't throw it away on a stranger, when your brother's son is living.

"Now, Uncle Anthony, I am going to make you a proposition. Bear in mind, if you please, that I am the only one who can restore little Jack to you. Only one other person knows about him and she

never heard of you, and doesn't know Jack's last name. If you will guarantee me five thousand dollars within three months, two thousand being cash down, I will myself bring on little Jack, and place him in your arms. Now, I am sorry to say that the boy has a miserable home, and is scantily supplied with the necessaries of life. A miserable career of poverty and perhaps crime, awaits him unless you come to my terms. Let me know as soon as possible what you propose to do.

"A letter directed to me at the Chicago post-office will reach me safely.

"Your affectionate nephew,

"LYMAN TAYLOR."

Anthony received this letter in due time, and deemed it of sufficient importance to warrant a visit to New York. He wished to lay it before Mr. Hardy, and ask his advice.

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARK RECEIVES A TELEGRAM.

"My good friend," said Mr. Hardy, "have you any reason to think your nephew's statement is to be relied upon?"

"I hope so," answered Anthony. "I am getting to be an old man, and I should like to feel that some one of my own blood would survive me, and profit by a part of the competence which God has bestowed upon me."

"It may be simply a money-making scheme on the part of Lyman," said the agent, thoughtfully. "Finding that he has little chance of becoming your heir, he wants to secure a handsome reward for restoring to you your grandson. Why has he not proposed it before?"

"Because he did not know I had any property to leave, or else because he supposed his own chances of inheriting good. After the last interview with me, he probably lost the hope of profiting by my death."

"There is something in what you say, Mr. Taylor. What is your own idea?"

"I would give five thousand dollars, if necessary, to secure the return of my grandson. It would give me an object to live for."

"I should be exceedingly sorry to see that sum pass into the hands of such a rascal as your graceless nephew."

"Would you offer two thousand?"

"I would hold no serious negotiations with him."

"But I would run the risk of leaving the poor boy to a life of poverty, and myself to a lonely old age."

"My idea is this. I will telegraph to Mark Manning, who is now in St. Louis, the particulars of your nephew's offer, with instructions to go at once to Chicago, find out Lyman, and put a detective on his track. If his story is true, he probably visits the boy from time to time. In this way it can be discovered where the boy lives, and steps can be taken to secure him."

"I approve of your plan," said Anthony. "Let it be carried out at once."

"There will be this advantage," added Hardy. "Your enterprising nephew will not realize any benefit from his nice little scheme for trading upon your affections."

"Do as you think best, my good friend. Your judgment is always better than mine."

John Hardy rapidly penned the following despatch.

"MARK MANNING, Planter's Hotel, St. Louis: Go at once to Chicago and find Lyman Taylor. He knows where child is. Employ a detective, and track him to boy's residence. Don't let him suspect your object. Keep me apprised of your progress. JOHN HARDY."

This despatch reached Mark within two hours. He had been in St. Louis several days, and had learned nothing. Two or three persons had called upon him with bogus information in the hope of a reward, but he was sharp enough to detect the imposition. He was beginning to despair of success when Mr. Hardy's telegram was received. Mark brightened up. He saw his way clearer now.

He went out to purchase a ticket for Chicago, and on his return found a second telegram in these words:

"Lyman admits knowledge of boy, and offers to restore him for five thousand dollars."

"I will endeavor to thwart Mr. Lyman Taylor,"

said Mark to himself. "He is a greater rascal than I thought."

Mark paid his bill and took the next train for Chicago. He arrived late, and registered at the Fremont House, where he prepared himself for the difficult work that lay before him by taking a good night's rest. In the morning he awoke hopeful and determined, and after breakfast went out to walk. He had no clue to the whereabouts of Lyman, but thought it possible he might meet him as he had done before in the streets.

He walked about for two hours, keeping his eyes wide open, but though he scanned many hundreds of faces, that of Lyman Taylor was not among them. Yet his walk was to be more successful than he anticipated.

Little Jack still continued his street trade of selling matches. Peggy was not willing to give up the small revenue she obtained from the boy's sales. Sometimes, also, a compassionate passer-by would bestow a dime or nickel on the boy, pitying him for his thin face and sad expression. Sometimes, if Tim were not by, he would buy a cheap lunch, for the scanty rations which he received from Peggy, left him in a chronic state of hunger.

It was fortunate that the poor boy indulged himself thus, or his feeble strength would hardly have held out against hunger and hard work combined.

Unwittingly Jack had made an active enemy in Tim Roach. His refusal to treat, Tim persuaded himself, was very mean, and his indignation was increased by the ill-success of his attempt to secure pay for the information given to Peggy. He was anxious to be revenged upon Jack, and was only waiting for an opportunity.

Malice generally finds its opportunity after awhile. One day Jack set down his basket of matches a moment while he ran into a shop to change a twenty-five cent piece. Tim was close at hand, and slyly secured the basket, and fled swiftly through a narrow passage-way with his booty. He had not only secured a stock of merchandise, but he had got Jack into trouble.

When Jack came out and found his basket gone he was in dismay.

"Who took my basket?" he inquired of an applewoman, who kept a stand close by.

"There was a bye here just now—bigger than you. He must have run off wid it when my back was turned away."

"Where did he go?" asked Jack, anxiously.

"I didn't mind."

"What was he like?"

"Shure I've seed him here afore wid you. You called him Tim."

"It was Tim Roach!" exclaimed Jack. "He's a mean boy. He took it to get me into trouble."

"Shure he looks like a thafe."

The tears started to Jack's eyes.

"I don't know what to do," he said, piteously. "I am afraid Peggy will beat me when I get home."

"Who is Peggy?" asked a new voice.

Jack looked towards the speaker. He saw a pleasant-faced boy, apparently about sixteen.

"She's the woman I live with," answered Jack.

"What will she beat you for?" asked Mark, for it was he. He had just come up, and hadn't heard of Jack's misfortune, but his heart was stirred to sympathy, by the sadness visible upon the little boy's face.

"For losing my matches," and thereupon Jack told his story to his new acquaintance.

"How much were the matches worth?" asked Mark.

"There were fourteen boxes. They cost me three cents a piece. Then there was the basket. That cost a quarter."

"Do you know where to buy more?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then take this dollar bill, and get a new supply."

Jack's little face glowed with gratitude.

"Oh, how kind you are!" he said.

"Do you generally stand here?" asked Mark.

"Yes, sir."

"Does this Peggy send you out every day?"

"Yes, sir."

"Is she related to you?"

"I thought she was my aunt," answered the match boy, "but last evening a gentleman called on Peggy, I heard them talking when they thought I was asleep," Jack continued in a lower tone. "I heard the gentleman say I had a grandfather living at the East, and that he would pay a good sum to get hold of me. I wish he would, for Peggy doesn't give me enough to eat, and sometimes she beats me."

"Tell me about this gentleman," said Mark in excitement. "Is he tall?"

"Yes, sir."

"With black hair and whiskers?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know his name?"

"No, sir; but there he is now!"

Mark followed the direction of the boy's finger, and he recognized, though his head was turned, the familiar form of Lyman Taylor on the opposite side of the street.

CHAPTER XXX.

MARK MAKES ARRANGEMENTS WITH JACK.

MARK'S excitement was at fever heat. In the most wonderful manner he had succeeded almost without an effort. He could not doubt that this boy was the very one of whom he was in search.

He was apprehensive that Lyman would turn, and on recognizing him penetrate his design and arrange to defeat it. But fortunately the object of his dread appeared to have other business in hand and kept on his way, never turning back.

"How old are you?" he asked, thinking it best to make assurance doubly sure.

"Peggy says I'm goin' on eight," answered the match boy.

"That is the right age," thought Mark.

"Have you always lived in Chicago?" he continued.

"No, sir; Peggy brought me from St. Louis when I was a very little child."

"I suppose you don't remember much about St. Louis?"

"I don't remember it at all."

"What does Peggy do for a living?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders.

"Nothing much," he answered; "she says she isn't well enough to work."

"Surely she does not depend wholly upon what you earn?"

"I don't know. Sometimes she gets money in a letter. I think it comes from her son."

"Then she has a son?"

"Yes."

"Where does he live?"

"I saw one of his letters once. It said Fall River on the wrapper. I think he works in a factory."

"Fall River is a city in Massachusetts. I have never been there, but I hear that they have factories there.

"So you can read writing?" asked Mark after a pause.

"Yes, a little."

"And I suppose you can read books and papers?"

"A little. I went to a primary school for a little while, and afterwards a lady used to hear my lessons. She lived in the same place with us."

"Did you like studying?"

"Ever so much. I should be happy if I could go to school again, but Peggy says I know enough, and she needs me to earn my living."

"Do you know the name of that gentleman you pointed out to me?"

"No, I don't think I heard Peggy mention his name."

"How long has he been in the habit of coming to see you and Peggy?"

"He has only been there two or three times. Peggy didn't remember him at first. I think they used to know each other a good while ago."

"Suppose this gentleman's story were true, and you had a grandfather at the East who could take good care of you, would you be willing to go to him?"

"Would he be kind to me? Do you know him?" asked the little fellow eagerly.

"Yes, I know him, and I am sure he would be very kind to you. Would you be willing to leave Peggy?"

"Yes," answered little Jack promptly.

"How does she treat you?"

"If I bring home a good bit of money, she pats me on the head and says I am a good boy, but if I

am not lucky she is very cross, and sometimes she beats me."

Mark's sympathies were aroused. Jack was so small, and weak in appearance, that it seemed to him revolting to think of his being at the mercy of a cruel old woman. Half unconsciously his fist doubled up, his teeth closed firmly together, and he just wished he had the merciless Peggy in his power.

"Is Peggy temperate?" he asked.

Jack looked at him inquiringly.

"Does she drink?" Mark asked, changing the form of his question.

"She drinks beer, and sometimes whiskey," answered Jack.

"Does she get—drunk?"

"Sometimes."

"How does it affect her?"

"It makes her sleepy or cross. I always run away when she has been drinking—when I can, but sometimes she locks the door and fastens me in. Then, if I can, I hide under the bed."

"Poor boy! you have a hard time of it. Now, Jack, can you keep a secret?"

Jack nodded, and his face assumed a cunning look, for the poor boy had more than once felt

obliged to practice dissimulation, in the rough school in which he had been trained.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then I am going to tell you a secret. Your grandfather sent me out here to find you."

"He sent you!" ejaculated Jack.

"Yes."

"But I thought he sent that gentleman—the one I pointed out to you."

"No; that gentleman, as you call him, is your mother's cousin. He is a near relation of yours."

"But he spoke to Peggy about carrying me back to my grandfather."

"He has an object in view. He won't give you up to your grandfather unless he gets a large sum of money. I suppose he has promised to give Peggy some of the money."

"Yes, I heard him promise Peggy a hundred dollars."

Mark smiled.

"Then I think he is going to cheat Peggy," he said. "He wants five thousand dollars for himself."

"Why, that is a good deal more than a hundred dollars."

"Yes, it is fifty times as much. Did Peggy seem to be satisfied with a hundred?"

"No; she said it was very little, but he said perhaps my grandfather would give her as much as that every year."

"It is evident he proposes to take the old woman in."

"I don't care, if he will only take me back to my grandfather. Will he give me enough to eat?"

"My poor child, are you hungry?" asked Mark, compassionately.

"Yes; I think I am always hungry," sighed Jack. "Peggy says I eat too much."

"You don't look much like it. Now Jack, one thing more. Would you be willing to leave Peggy, and go to New York with me?"

"Would you take me to my grandfather?"

"Yes; that is just what I want to do."

"I am ready to go now," said Jack, putting his hand confidingly in Mark's.

"That is well, but it will be better to wait till to-morrow. What time do you get up in the morning?"

"About eight o'clock. It isn't any use to go out too early."

"And at what time do you come here, Jack?"

"About half-past eight or nine."

"Then I will meet you to-morrow, somewhere

about that time, and I will have tickets ready to take us to New York. We can catch the ten o'clock train. There isn't any danger of Peggy keeping you, is there?"

"Not unless she thinks I am goin' to run away."

"She mustn't suspect that. We must be sure to keep that from her. I suppose you have no other clothes than those you have on?"

"No, sir."

"I will hunt up a clothing-store, and get you fitted out before we start. I shouldn't like your grandfather to see you in that ragged suit."

Jack looked down at his jacket, frayed, tattered and greasy, and said:

"I've often wished I had nice clothes like that boy," and he pointed out a boy of about his own age, dressed in knickerbockers.

"You shall have your wish to-morrow, Jack. Now I suppose you had better go and buy some more matches, so that Peggy won't suspect anything."

"Yes, sir."

"You'll be sure to meet me to-morrow, Jack?"

"Yes, sir."

"And don't let Peggy suspect from your looks that anything is going on."

"Yes, sir."

"Everything looks favorable," thought Mark as he walked slowly to his hotel. "To-morrow at this time Peggy and the worthy Lyman will be mourning for a lost boy."

CHAPTER XXXI.

JACK TALKS IN HIS SLEEP.

JACK was naturally very much excited by the new prospects that opened out before him. He had seen little happiness in his short life. It is a sad thing to say that he had hardly ever known what it was to eat a full meal. Cold and pinching privation, and long, toilsome days in the streets, had been his portion hitherto. Was it possible, he asked himself, that all this was to be changed.

Was he to have a home like other boys, and a relation who was able to supply him with the comforts of which he knew so little?

It seemed like a dream, and little Jack might have been tempted to distrust the information which had been given to him. But somehow he could not help feeling confidence in what Mark told him. He felt that Mark would not deceive him, and the dream must come true after all.

Jack finished out the day as usual, and went

home. Peggy's attention was at once called to the new basket.

"Where did that come from?" she asked.

"My basket was stolen, and a kind gentleman gave me money to buy this." Jack answered.

"Was the matches stole too?"

"Yes; he gave me money enough to buy as many as I lost."

"Who stole 'em? Do you know?"

"I think it was Tim Roach. He was hangin' round, at the time I lost it."

"Did he snatch it from you?"

"No; I laid it down a minute while I went into a cigar store to get a quarter changed for a gentleman who had just bought a box of matches, when Tim picked it up and ran away."

"I'd like to get hold of Tim!" said Peggy wrathfully. "I'd wring his neck for him, the little wretch!"

Then a new and cunning idea came to Peggy.

"I tell you what to do, Jack," she said; "just you go out to-morrow mornin' without any basket, and begin to cry, and tell people that you've had your matches stolen. Then somebody'll give you money, and you can bring it home."

"But that would be tellin' a lie, Peggy," objected Jack.

"And what if it is!" retorted Peggy. "You needn't be so dreadfully good. It ain't a lie that'll hurt anybody, and the gentlemen that gives you the money won't miss it."

It occurred to Jack that it would suit his plans to go out the next morning without the basket. Considering how he had been brought up, his conscience was unusually tender, and he would not have liked to leave the city without returning the basket and his stock-in-trade to Peggy. Besides, she could have him arrested for theft, if she chose. He decided, therefore, that he would make no further objection to Peggy's proposal.

"Just as you say, Peggy," he said, submissively.

"That's a good boy!" said Peggy, good-humoredly. "That's a pretty good snap!" she said to herself, complacently. "I don't know why we shouldn't foller it up. It'll be more than the profit of the matches, and Jack can do it two or three times a day."

It did, indeed, seem a very ingenious method of raising money, and answered the purpose of begging, without being open to the usual objection.

Jack usually got tired with being about the streets all day, and after he had eaten the frugal

supper with which Peggy had provided him, he lay down on a pallet provided for him in the corner of the room, and was soon asleep. But with such a momentous secret on his mind, it will not be a matter of surprise that Jack's thoughts, even in sleep, were occupied with his new plan. Whenever he was restless he was apt to talk in his sleep, and did so on the present occasion.

Peggy had not gone to bed, but sat in an old wooden rocking-chair, smoking a pipe.

"What's the boy sayin'?" she asked herself, as Jack began to talk. "I'll listen, and then if he's been up to any mischief, he'll out with it."

She removed the pipe, and drawing near the pallet, bent over, and strove to catch the disconnected words that fell from the boy's lips.

"I'm goin'—to—my grandfather!" she heard Jack say, and the words startled her.

"Who's been talkin' to him about his grandfather?" Peggy exclaimed, startled. "I didn't know he'd heard a word about him."

"He says—he will—take me!" continued Jack, in a drowsy tone.

"He says he'll take him!" repeated Peggy, in surprise and alarm. "Who's he, I'd like to know."

Her suspicions fell at once upon Lyman. No one, so far as she knew, had any knowledge of Jack's relations except Lyman. Evidently Lyman had been talking to the boy on the sly.

"The villain!" said Peggy, indignantly; "I know what he's up to. He wants to get the boy away from me, and get all the reward himself. He's going to leave Peggy out in the cowld, and abduct the boy on the sly. I've found him out, the 'artful schamer. So he thinks he can overrache ould Peggy, does he? He'll find it's a cowld day when ould Peggy gets left."

Jack began to talk again.

"He says he'll take me off in the cars," he continued. "I like to ride in the cars. My grandfather will give me enough to eat, and I won't have to sell matches for a livin'"

"The ongrateful young kid," commented Peggy, looking angrily at the sleeping boy. "So he wants to lave me who've took care of him ever since he was a babby, and he don't mind it no more 'n if I was a puppy dog. *I* that have been a mother to him!"

Peggy rocked back and forward, and actually persuaded herself that little Jack was very ungrateful. It is curious how we misrepresent matters from our own point of view. It was

Jack who had supported Peggy, and she was far more indebted to him than he was to her, but somehow she could not see it. She did, however, understand fully how unpleasant it would be to lose Jack's services, unless she could receive, as Lyman had led her to expect, an adequate compensation from his grandfather.

Peggy deliberated as to what was best to be done. In the first place, she wanted to find out for a certainty whether Lyman had really entered into a conspiracy against her and meant to abduct Jack without her knowledge or consent. It seemed on the whole, the best thing to get up herself and follow Jack the next morning, and make sure that Lyman did not have a secret conference with him.

When Jack was ready to start out the next morning, Peggy asked with apparent carelessness, "Jack, dear, do you ever see the tall gentleman that calls here sometimes?"

"Yes, Peggy; I saw him yesterday," answered Jack, readily.

"And what did he say to you?" she asked eagerly.

"He didn't speak to me at all."

"That's a lie!" Peggy said to herself. "He told the bye not to tell." But she didn't think it

best to charge Jack with it, and so through him put Lyman on his guard.

"Remember, lad, you've got no better friend than ould Peggy. If you should lave her, she'd die of grafe."

"Thank you, Peggy," said Jack, but he was not much impressed by this declaration of affection from one who often beat and systematically starved him.

Five minutes after Jack had left the house, Peggy threw on her old cloak, and, at a safe distance, followed her youthful charge, meaning to keep him under her eye, and watch lest he should be carried off by Lyman Taylor. But luckily for Jack, whose meeting with Mark would otherwise have been detected, she changed her plan, when she recognized a little in advance Lyman himself on State Street.

"It'll be better to watch him," she decided, and gave up following Jack.

Meanwhile Jack had not been at his usual stand more than ten minutes, when Mark came up.

"I am glad you are ahead of time, Jack," he said. "Come along with me."

CHAPTER XXXII.

JACK IS PURSUED.

"ARE you goin' to take me away to-day?" asked Jack, who wished to be assured that the dream was coming true.

"Yes, Jack, but I can't take you away as you are. I know a place near by where you can take a good bath. I will leave you then, and go round by myself and buy you some clothes. I can guess your size."

He led the way to a barber's shop which advertised baths, procured a ticket, and leaving Jack with strict injunctions to wash himself thoroughly, sallied out in search of an outfit for his young companion. That did not take long. He returned with two good sized bundles, and requested Jack to dress himself in them. When Jack emerged from the bath-room he was quite transformed. He was still thin, and his features looked pinched, but his dress was, in all respects, that of a boy belonging to a well-to-do family.

"Now I think I must have your hair cut, and you will do."

In truth, Jack's long, elf-like locks made his face appear even thinner than it really was.

"Don't you want to be shaved, too, young man?" asked the barber, jocosely.

"Perhaps he wants to be shaved," said Jack, pointing to Mark, with a smile.

Mark colored a little, realizing that he scarcely needed that operation any more than Jack.

"Now look at yourself in the glass, Jack!" said Mark.

Jack obeyed, and looked first bewildered, then pleased. He thought at first that he was looking at another boy.

"Is that me?" he inquired, almost incredulously.

"I think it is. Peggy wouldn't know you," answered Mark, with a smile.

"I don't want her to," answered the little boy.

Mark had forgotten one thing—a pair of shoes. As he scanned Jack critically, he noted the omission, and said, "Jack, we must go to a shoe store. It will never do for a young gentleman like you to wear a pair of shoes out at the toes and sides."

"They don't look very well," said Jack, with a downward look.

"As you may be taken for my son," said Mark gravely, "I want you to look well."

"You're only a boy!" said Jack, who was inclined to a literal understanding of what was told him.

"You wouldn't take me for twenty-five, then, Jack?"

"No, you're not that, are you?"

"Well, not quite."

They had not far to go to a shoe store, but it took some time to get fitted to a pair of shoes, on account of Jack's having a high instep. This delay came near wrecking their plans. Tim Roach, who usually passed his time in roaming about the streets, without any special occupation, caught sight of Jack as he entered the shoe store with Mark. He let his eye rest upon him carelessly at first, but his indifferent glance was soon succeeded by a look of the most intense amazement.

"My eye!" he exclaimed, "if that isn't little Jack dressed out like a prince! What's happened, I wonder, and who's that with him? I jest wish he'd rig me out that way."

Tim did not make himself known, but peered curiously in at the door of the store.

"I wonder whether Peggy knows about it?"

he soliloquized. "I don't believe she does. Wouldn't she open her eyes to see the kid rigged out that way. I'd like to tell her."

Circumstances seemed to favor the gratification of this wish, for not many rods away he caught sight of Peggy and Lyman Taylor talking together.

"I'll go and tell her," he said.

We will precede him and relate what had taken place between the two schemers. Peggy had started out with the confident belief that Lyman had played her false, and meant to carry away Jack without her knowledge or consent. It did, indeed, look as if she were correct, for it must be remembered that she knew nothing of Mark's mission to Chicago, Lyman not having thought it necessary to tell her. She wanted to meet Lyman and "have it out with him," if she found any confirmation in her suspicions.

Lyman chanced to turn, and seeing Peggy with her eyes fixed on him, retraced his steps till he reached her.

"Do you want to see me, Peggy?" he asked.

"Yes, I wanted to see you, Mr. Lyman Taylor, and ask what you mane by tryin' to stale away the bye from me?"

Lyman stared at her in surprise.

"I don't know what you mean," he answered, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I thought it was understood that we would restore the boy to his grandfather if he would make it worth our while."

"And you didn't mane to take away the bye without my knowin' it?"

"Certainly not. Who told you so?"

"And you haven't told the bye about goin' back to his grandfather?"

"I haven't spoken a word to the boy on the subject."

"Then how did he know about it?"

"Does he know about it?"

Peggy then told her companion about what she had overheard Jack say in his sleep the night before. Lyman Taylor was surprised and alarmed, and these feelings were so evident on his face that Peggy acquitted him of any breach of faith.

"I don't understand it," he said, meditatively. "I have never spoken a word about the matter except in your room. Did you ask him about it?"

"I asked him when did he see you, and he said yesterday."

"He might have seen me, but I had no conversation with him."

"So he said."

"He told the truth. I don't think any harm is done, Peggy. He must have overheard what we were talking about when we supposed him asleep."

"That's true. Maybe he did."

"That won't interfere with our plans that I can see. I have written to my uncle and expect to hear from him in a few days. I will let you know what he says as soon as I get the letter."

Then it was that Tim Roach came up, looking preternaturally knowing.

"How are you, Peg?" he said. "Are you walkin' wid your beau?"

"Go away wid you! You're always botherin'."

"You'd orter see what I did jest now," said Tim, wagging his head.

"What did you see, then?"

"I seed your Jack rigged out like a prince in new clothes and a new hat. Didn't he look fine?"

"You saw Jack dressed that way?" gasped Peggy.

"Yes, I did."

"You're lyin' now."

"Wish I may die if I didn't."

"Where was he?"

"In Simpson's shoe store, pickin' out a nice new pair of shoes."

"How could the boy get all these things without money!" asked Lyman incredulous.

"There was a big boy wid him was buyin' the things."

"A big boy!" repeated Lyman quickly; "how old was he!"

"Maybe sixteen or seventeen."

An expression, full of dismay, overspread Lyman Taylor's face.

"It is Mark Manning!" he exclaimed. "Quick, boy, tell me where he is."

"In Simpson's shoe store."

"And who is Mark Manning!" asked Peggy bewildered.

"The boy his grandfather sent out here to find him. It's he that has been telling Jack about his grandfather. Quick, Peggy! we must go and stop him, or he'll take Jack away and leave us out in the cold."

The ill-matched pair hurried to the place indicated by Tim.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

MARK ELUDES HIS PURSUERS.

LITTLE Jack had been fitted with a pair of shoes, and Mark had settled for them, when the little boy chancing to look towards the entrance of the store, was almost paralyzed by the sight of Peggy and Lyman looking in at the window. His eyes were good, and he could read on Peggy's face a malicious exultation, which boded ill for him when he should again find himself in her clutches.

Mark, who had not seen them, noticed the fear upon the face of his little charge.

"What's the matter, Jack?" he asked.

"It's them!" answered Jack, hoarsely.

"Who's them?"

"Peggy—and the gentleman."

"Where are they?"

"Looking in at the winder."

Mark had his wits about him, and did not turn round. He wished Peggy and her confederate to think themselves undiscovered, while he rapidly considered what was best to be done.

Should he leave the store by the front door, Jack would at once be pounced upon by Peggy, and there would be a scene.

He might eventually recover Jack, but in the meantime the boy would be ill-treated, stripped of his good clothes, and perhaps carried out of the city. Just as success seemed assured, he was confronted by defeat.

What was to be done?

Mark was not a boy to give in, unless compelled to do so. An idea came to him.

"Jack," he said in a low voice, "don't look towards the window again. Don't let them know you have seen them."

"You won't let Peggy get hold of me!" said the boy in a trembling voice.

"Not if I can help it."

Turning to the salesman who had waited upon him, Mark said:

"There are some people at the door that I want to avoid meeting. Is there any back entrance to the store?"

"Yes," answered the clerk.

"Will you be kind enough to guide us to it?"

"Certainly."

"Don't look behind you, Jack, but come with me. Don't be alarmed!"

The salesman guided them to a door opening on a narrow street. Boxes of goods were so piled up, that this door could not be seen from the window into which Peggy and Lyman were looking.

"Where are they going?" Peggy asked.

"To look at some goods in the back part of the store," answered Lyman.

This reassured Peggy, who kept her position, feeling sure that Jack could not escape her when he came out.

"I'll sell his new clothes," she thought complacently. "I'll be in luck after all."

Once out of the store, Mark looked about him. He felt that it behooved him to get beyond the reach of Jack's pursuers as soon as possible. Circumstances favored him. Just at the head of the street, he saw a lady descend from a hack.

"Hurry up, Jack," he said. "We'll get into this cab."

The driver was about to drive away, after settling with his fare, when Mark hailed him.

"Are you unengaged?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Can you drive me at once to the Union Depot in Van Buren Street?"

"Yes, sir."

He dismounted from the box, opened the door

for his next passengers, and they got in. Then resuming his place on the box, he drove rapidly away.

It so chanced that he passed by the front of the very store from which they had just emerged.

Little Jack stole a glance out of the window of the cab.

"There's Peg!" he said.

Following his example, Mark also caught sight of the two with their faces glued to the window, still looking in, unconscious that their prey had escaped them.

Mark smiled. He felt like a victor, and rather enjoyed the thought of having outgeneraled the fox.

"I hope they'll have a good time watching for us, Jack," he said.

The little boy still felt nervous.

"Do you think they'll catch me?" he asked.

"No, Jack, I think they'll get left this time."

The cab made its way rapidly through the crowded streets, and in a very short time drew up at the Union Depot.

Mark paid the driver, and accompanied by Jack, made his way to the ticket office.

"How soon will there be a train East?" he asked.

"In ten minutes."

"That will suit us, Jack."

He bought tickets, and, the cars being ready, they took their seats in a comfortable car of the Lake Shore and Michigan Railroad.

"If they should come here!" suggested Jack, nervously.

"They would have to run fast, if our train leaves on time. There is no danger, Jack. Even if they suspect that we have left the store, they wouldn't know where we are gone."

Still, even Mark felt relieved and reassured when the signal was given and the long train began to steam out of the depot.

"Wouldn't you like to go back and bid Peggy good-by?" he asked, jocosely.

"I hope I shall never see Peggy again," answered the little boy, shuddering.

"If you ever do, there won't be any danger of her doing you any harm. Your grandfather will take care of that."

In his hurry to leave the city, Mark had been compelled to leave his bill at the hotel unpaid, but his valise was left behind as security. At the first opportunity he telegraphed to the landlord, promising to remit the necessary money,

and asking him to hold the valise till instructed where to send it by express.

We will now go back to Peggy and Lyman, who were impatiently maintaining their watch at the window of the shoe store.

When fifteen minutes had passed, and Jack and Mark did not appear, they became alarmed.

"Where are they?" muttered Peggy. "It's long enough they are stayin'."

"You are right, Peggy."

Just then a policeman tapped him on the shoulder. He had been watching them for some time and their conduct seemed to him suspicious.

"What are you doing here, my man?" he asked, suspiciously. "You had better move on."

"We are waiting for some one to come out," answered Lyman.

"How long do you mean to wait? Is this woman with you?"

"Yes," answered Lyman, reluctantly, for he was not proud of his companion, whose appearance was hardly calculated to do him credit.

"Shure, my little bye has been shtole," she put in, "and he's in the store now wid the man that shtole him."

"Then you'd better go in and claim him instead of standing here and blocking up the sidewalk."

"I think I will follow your advice," said Lyman. "Will you be kind enough to stay here a minute, in case I need your help?"

"Very well; only be quick."

Lyman entered the store, and failing to see Jack and Mark, addressed one of the salesmen.

"Two boys were in here a short time since," he said; "one large one and one small one. Can you tell me where they are?"

It happened that the salesman addressed was the same one who had guided the boys to the back entrance. At least fifteen minutes had elapsed, and there would be no danger in telling the truth.

"They went away some time since," he answered.

'They did not go out the front door, for I've been there all the time."

"There's another door," quietly retorted the clerk.

"Where?" asked Lyman, in dismay.

"In the rear of the store."

"Sold, by thunder!" exclaimed Lyman, under his breath. "How long have they been gone?"

"Fifteen minutes. Were they friends of yours?"

"The small boy was my son," answered Lyman, unblushingly.

"And was the woman I saw with you at the window his mother?" asked the salesman, with a smile.

"Certainly not," answered Lyman, coloring with indignation. "The older boy has abducted him."

"Why didn't you come in sooner, then?"

"I wish I had."

Great was Peggy's dismay when Lyman told her what he had learned. She had fully decided to beat Jack soundly, and now she was baffled of her revenge. The two confederates spent the rest of the day in wandering about the streets of Chicago in search of Jack and his friend, but their search was in vain.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MRS. MANNING'S HOUSE IS SOLD.

It is now time to return to Pocasset and inquire how our old acquaintances are prospering.

It was still a matter of wonder what had become of Mark. Mrs. Manning gave no information, and no letters were received at the post-office which would throw light on the mystery. Mark, by arrangement, directed all his letters to Mr. Hardy, who inclosed and forwarded them to the Pocasset office. Tom Wyman, the postmaster's son, was puzzled to account for the letters received from New York by Mrs. Manning.

"They must be from Mark," said James Collins.

"They don't seem to be in Mark's handwriting."

"He probably gets some one to direct them for him, so as to throw dust in our eyes."

This was the conclusion upon which the two boys finally settled.

Another cause of wonder was the hermit's visits to the city. Since he had heard that his

grandson was living, he went up often to consult with Mr. Hardy. Family affection in him had not died out. It had only been dormant, and now it was thoroughly reawakened.

"I long to see my daughter's boy," he said. "It will give me something to live for. I tremble lest the cup of happiness should be dashed from my lips, just as my hopes are awakened."

"Don't be anxious, old friend. Your affairs are in good hands. Mark is only a boy, but he has far more discretion and fidelity than most men. Do you know what I have in view?"

"Well?"

"If he succeeds in this enterprise I propose, with his mother's permission, to take him into my office, and train him up in my business. I have hitherto employed boys simply as boys, but Mark is one whom I can train up for a responsible position. I am getting older every year, and when I am really old, I shall be glad to have a young man at my side upon whom I can shift the burden of my business. Do you think his mother would object?"

"Mrs. Manning is a sensible woman. I think she will be glad to have her son so well provided for. If it is necessary I will myself advise her to commit him to your charge."

At length a telegram came from Mark, and by good luck when Mr. Taylor was in the office of his agent. It ran thus:

"JOHN HARDY, NEW YORK.

"I am on my way to New York with little Jack. Particulars when we meet.

"MARK MANNING."

"There, old friend, what do you say to that?" asked John Hardy, triumphantly. "Didn't I tell you the boy would succeed? Was my confidence misplaced?"

"He had my confidence from the first," said Anthony, his face luminous with happiness, "but I knew he had an adroit enemy in my nephew Lyman. I didn't dare to expect that a country boy would be equal to the emergency."

"Now, you can go home with a light heart. In a day or two, your grandson will be with you. What are your plans respecting him? Shall you take him to Pocasset?"

"I don't think I can do better. He will need a woman's care, and I know of no one who will prove kinder than Mrs. Manning."

"She has this in her favor at any rate. She has brought up her own boy well. But will the house be large or comfortable enough?"

"I am not very particular for myself. You will judge that when you remember the cabin in the woods, where I spent several years. The house is small, however, but there is another vacant, much larger and handsomer, which I can buy or rent, already furnished. The owner and occupant died recently, and his heirs, living in a distant state, want to sell it. It has a handsome lawn and a garden attached. It stands near the house of Mr. Collins."

"Well, you are able to gratify your own taste in the matter. I will send Mark down as soon as he arrives,"

When Anthony reached home, he found Mrs. Manning anxious and perturbed. The cause will require some explanation.

The small cottage in which Mark and his mother lived did not belong to them. They rented it from Deacon Brooks, an old farmer living just out of the village, at five dollars monthly rental. For a special reason Squire Collins desired to possess it. He owned the lot adjoining, and it occurred to him that the two combined would make a desirable property. The house, which was a cottage, could be raised one story, and made much more commodious. In that case, it would easily command more than twice the

rent. The foreman of the shoe-shop stood prepared to rent it of him, as soon as the alteration was made.

He therefore approached Deacon Brooks, with a proposition to purchase it.

"I don't know," said the deacon. "I never thought of sellin', but I can't say I'm opposed to it. I'm getting good rent from the widder Manning."

"There's no knowing, deacon, how long she'll be able to pay her rent," said the squire, nodding with a meaning look.

"Sho! you don't say! She ain't lost any money, has she?"

"She had none to lose. Her boy Mark has about supported her with his small earnings in the shop. But he isn't employed there any longer."

"I heard something of that. Did you discharge him?"

"Yes; he got too uppish—wasn't willing to obey orders. I was sorry to discharge him on his mother's account, but it was his own fault."

"Seems to me I haven't seen him round the village lately?"

"No; he has gone to the city on some wild goose expedition. My boy James thinks he is

blacking boots or selling papers. As to that I can't say, but it isn't likely he is able to help his mother much."

"I hear Mrs. Manning has a boarder?"

"Yes; it's the old hermit that lived in the woods. I believe he has a small pension from some relations, but it doesn't amount to much. Probably he doesn't pay more than two or three dollars a week board. That won't go far, eh, deacon?"

"You're right there, squire. It costs a sight to live. How much do you think my grocery bill came to last month?"

"I don't know," answered the squire, with a curious smile. The deacon had the reputation of being very close-fisted, and it was rather amusing to hear him speak of the cost of living.

"Fifteen dollars and sixty-seven cents," said the deacon, with the air of one who hardly expected to be believed.

"I believe you have six in family," said Squire Collins, with a smile.

"Yes, six, including the hired man."

"I pity your family," thought the squire, who, at all events, kept a liberal table.

"Yes, it costs a great deal to live," he added, "and, of course, the Widow Manning, though her

family is small, can't live on nothing. When she finds she can't pay all her bills, she will probably begin by being remiss in her rent."

"That's so, squire! She's allus paid so far right up to the handle, though."

"When she had Mark's help; but as I told you he is not now in a condition to help his mother. Well, what do you say? Shall I have the house?"

Then commenced the bargaining. Both parties were sharp, but at length a conclusion was reached. Squire Collins agreed to pay eight hundred and fifty dollars for the cottage, five hundred to remain on bond and mortgage, at six per cent. In a day or two the necessary papers were made out, and then Squire Collins took a walk over to the cottage, to inform Mrs. Manning that the house had passed into his possession, and it would be necessary for her to find another home.

It might have been supposed he would feel some compunction, but he did not have much feeling or sympathy for the widow. The ill-feeling between Mark and his son had its effect upon him also.

CHAPTER XXXV.

NOTICE TO QUIT.

THERE are some men who enjoy the prospect of dealing a blow, and watching the effect—men whose best feelings have been deadened, and who have lost all sympathy for those less fortunate than themselves. That Squire Collins was a man of this kind will not seem strange to those who have followed the course of this story. He set out for Mrs. Manning's cottage with a comfortable complacency, though he knew that the communication he had to make would bring her great trouble and sorrow.

Quite unconscious of the impending blow, Mrs. Manning was sitting at the front window engaged in sewing, while her thoughts were with her absent boy, whom she seemed to miss more and more as his absence lengthened. Casually looking up from her work, she saw with considerable surprise the dignified figure of Squire Collins turning in at her gate.

"What can bring the squire here," she thought,

She was not in the habit of receiving or expecting calls from her aristocratic townsman, and concluded that he must have some special object in calling.

Perhaps he had come to offer to take Mark back into the shop. If so, it might be the best thing for her son. She knew very little of old Anthony's circumstances, and she did not anticipate any permanent position for Mark from that quarter.

"Good morning, Squire Collins," she said, politely.

"Good morning, Mrs. Manning," he responded, somewhat stiffly.

"Won't you come in?"

"Thank you; I will step in for a few minutes, I have a little business to speak of."

"It must be that he means to take Mark back into the shop," thought the widow, cheerfully.

She led the way into the plain sitting-room, and invited the village magnate to take a seat.

"Ahem! your son Mark is away?" remarked the squire, inquiringly. This confirmed Mrs. Manning in her conjecture as to the squire's errand."

"Yes," she answered; "but I think he will be at home before long. I miss him a great deal."

"I suppose he can't make a living in New York," thought the squire. Rather fortunately he didn't inquire where Mark was, since this would have embarrassed Mrs. Manning, who knew that it was a secret not to be mentioned, and yet would have been reluctant to offend the squire by withholding the information.

"Probably he will be as well off at home," said the squire. "I don't believe much in boys leaving home on wild-goose expeditions. They think it perfectly easy to earn a living elsewhere, but they are pretty apt to reap only disappointment."

"I dare say you are right, squire," said Mrs. Manning, leading up to the subject of a return to the shop; "but there didn't seem to be anything for Mark to do at home."

Squire Collins understood her object, but had no intention of offering employment to Mark. He looked at the widow with a peculiar smile, and enjoyed the disappointment which his next words were calculated to bring.

"I dare say Mark can hire out to some good farmer," he replied, indifferently. "Farming is a good healthy business."

Mrs. Manning sighed, for she rightly interpreted that no place in the shop was to be offered to Mark.

"Ahem!" said the squire, changing the subject; "you have a boarder, I understand?"

"Yes; Mr. Taylor makes his home with us."

"A sensible move on his part. It was a strange thing to live in the woods by himself so many years. I hope he will be able to pay his board."

"He pays regularly every week," answered the widow.

"I presume he's quite poor?"

"Mark thinks he has considerable money, but I have no means of judging, except that he pays his bills promptly."

Squire Collins shrugged his shoulders.

"Mark is an inexperienced boy," he said. "The truth is, as I understand, old Anthony receives a small pension from some relatives in New York. It can't be much, but I hope, for your sake, that he has enough to pay his board."

Mrs. Manning began to wonder whether this was what Squire Collins came to talk about. She was soon more fully informed.

"How long have you lived in this cottage, Mrs. Manning?" asked the squire.

"Ten years, sir."

"You hire of Deacon Brooks?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ahem! I came here this morning to acquaint you with the fact that I have just bought the property."

"Has Deacon Brooks sold to you?" asked the widow, in surprise.

"Yes; the papers have passed, and the transfer has been made. I am now the legal owner."

"I shall be glad to keep the house, Squire Collins, if you have no other views," said Mrs. Manning. "I have been paying five dollars a month rent, and if that is satisfactory——"

"The fact is, Mrs. Manning," interrupted the squire, "I *have* other views. I intend to raise the house a story, and have promised to rent it, when completed, to my foreman, Mr. Lake, who contemplates marriage. He is boarding at present, as you know."

Mrs. Manning was very much disturbed. It is no light thing to be forced to leave a house which has been one's home for a period of ten years, especially in a country town where surplus houses are generally scarce and hard to find.

"I don't know where I can go," said the widow, anxiously.

"No doubt you'll find some place," said the squire, carelessly.

"How soon do you want me to vacate the

house, Squire Collins?" asked Mrs. Manning, anxiously.

"At the end of the month."

"But that is only a week from to-day."

"Quite true."

"That is a very short time."

"It ought to be time enough, Mrs. Manning," said the squire, stiffly.

"I would be willing to pay a little higher rent if you would allow me to remain, Squire Collins."

"Quite out of the question, Mrs. Manning. Indeed, I will say that I think you already pay all you can afford to. I doubt whether you will be able—with Mark out of employment—to keep up your present rent. As I understand, about all your income comes from a boarder, whose means must be extremely limited, and who, in all probability, will end his days in the almshouse."

"I don't know of any other house in the village."

"Well, you can think it over; of course that is your own affair, not mine."

"If Mark were only at home," said the perplexed woman; "I would know better what to do."

"You had better send for him then. Good morning."

Squire Collins rose and left the presence of the widow whom he had made thoroughly anxious and unhappy.

In the course of the afternoon old Anthony came home. He was looking unusually jubilant and happy, in direct contrast with the widow's anxious face.

"Mrs. Manning," he said, "I bring you good news."

"I am glad of it, sir, for I have only bad news."

"And what is your bad news?"

"I must leave this house."

"How is that?" asked the hermit, looking surprised.

"Because it has been sold. Squire Collins has bought it, and says that he is intending to enlarge it, and then let it to Mr. Lake, his foreman."

"And that is all your bad news?"

"Yes, sir; but I consider it bad enough. I don't know where I can go."

"I will let you have my cabin in the woods rent free," said the hermit, with a smile.

"I don't know but I shall have to go there," said the widow, sighing.

"You don't ask me what my good news is," said Anthony.

"I would like to hear it, sir."

"By day after to-morrow Mark will be home."

Mrs. Manning's face did brighten up at this intelligence.

"This is really good news," she said gladly. "Mark will advise me what to do."

"Mark will not come alone. Do you think, Mrs. Manning, you can accommodate another boarder?"

"Who is it, sir?"

"A little boy. I don't care to keep it secret. It is my grandson."

"Your grandson?"

"Yes; I sent Mark out West to find him. He has succeeded in his mission, and the two are now on the way home."

"I shall be glad to take him, sir, if I have anywhere to receive him. Squire Collins's visit has rather upset me, and I don't know what to do, or where to turn."

"If your only trouble is about a house, I will undertake to find one for you. Don't borrow any trouble on that score."

"But I don't know of any house that will come within my means."

"I am afraid, Mrs. Manning, that you haven't confidence in me. I tell you again, not to borrow any trouble. I may as well tell you that this house will not be large enough for your increased family, and that I intended to propose to you to take another."

The widow's anxiety was somewhat relieved. Still she could not help wondering what house old Anthony would succeed in finding. There was one comfort. In two days Mark would be at home, and would be able to help him.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HERMIT SECURES A HOUSE.

A SHORT distance from the house occupied by Squire Collins was one which had been for six months vacant. It had been erected as a summer residence by a New York gentleman, and occupied by him for several seasons. It was the finest house in the village, and it seemed a pity it should remain untenanted.

Mr. Beech, the builder, now spent his summers at various watering-places, and had apparently tired of Pocasset. It was understood that the house was left in the hands of Mr. Thompson, who was authorized to let it to a responsible tenant.

Old Anthony the next morning made it in his way to call at the office of Mr. Thompson. The latter received him with his usual courtesy.

"I hear that you are boarding with Mrs. Manning, Mr. Taylor," he said.

"Yes."

"I think you must find it much more agreeable than your life in the woods."

"I do; I am getting over my misanthropy, and am taking more cheerful views of life."

"That is good. My son Frank is an intimate friend of Mark, and thinks a great deal of him and his mother."

"So do I," responded the hermit. "Mark is a straightforward boy, and will succeed life."

"I hope so. I wish I had anything for him to do—Frank would be glad. Perhaps in time I may find him a place."

"I think I shall be able to provide employment for Mark myself," said the hermit, quietly.

Mr. Thompson regarded him with surprise. Like the rest of the villagers, he had been in the habit of regarding old Anthony as a man of limited means.

"By-the-way, Mr. Thompson, I called this morning on a little matter of business," continued the hermit. "I believe you have the rental of the Beach house."

"Yes," answered Mr. Thompson, somewhat surprised.

"I am acquainted with a family who are on the lookout for a house in Groveton. This, I think, would suit them, if the rent is not too high."

"It is, you know, a fine house. Would your friends like to have it furnished?"

"I think so."

"In that case, the rent will be four hundred dollars a year, or a hundred dollars a quarter. In the city, or at Long Branch, as you probably are aware, four times as much would be required."

"I think that will be satisfactory. Can immediate possession be given?"

"Yes; I will at once set the cleaners to work, and have it got ready by the end of the week. One question I am obliged to ask. Is the party for whom you are acting, responsible, in a pecuniary way?"

"The first quarter's rent will be paid in advance."

"Pretty satisfactory. May I ask the name of the tenant?"

"There are reasons for keeping it secret for a few days."

"Oh, well, that is not material."

Old Anthony never said a word about what he had done, for, as my readers will conjecture, he meant to have Mark and his mother occupy the house. It did, however, get noised about, that Mr. Beach's house was taken. Squire Collins among others, was curious to ascertain something about the new tenants, and made a call on Mr.

Thompson, with the special object of finding out.

"I am no wiser than you, Squire Collins," said Mr. Thompson. "Of course we shall all know in a few days."

"By whom was the matter negotiated?"

"There again I am bound to secrecy, but all will be known."

"Of course the party must have ample means, and I look forward to having a pleasant neighbor —there are very few in the village with whom we can associate, on an equality, and so any good family is an acquisition.

"You are more fastidious than I, Squire Collins," said Mr. Thompson smiling. "I don't value men according to the size of their pocket-books."

"You must admit, however, that refinement and wealth are likely to go together. You are not too democratic for that?"

"I am not sure. I have known many rich people who were very far from being refined. By-the-way, I hear that you have bought the house occupied by Mrs. Manning."

"Yes."

"Shall you allow her to remain there?"

"No; I mean to enlarge it, and let my foreman occupy it."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

CONCLUSION.

MEANWHILE, Mrs. Manning could not help feeling anxious, about her prospects of a house.

"Have you heard of any house, Mr. Taylor?" she asked.

The hermit smiled.

"Don't be troubled, Mrs. Manning," he said; "when you leave this house you will find another one to move into."

Mrs. Manning was silenced, but still disquieted. She was even tempted to wonder whether old Anthony was really quite right in his mind. But there was nothing to be done. She could only wait, patiently.

The next day Mark arrived with little Jack. He was looking unusually well, his journey having given him a healthy color, and added to his flesh. Jack was still thin and pale, but was beginning to look better than when under Peggy's care.

The hermit was much moved, as he took the boy in his arms and kissed him.

"I can see my daughter's looks in you, Jack," he said. "I fear your life has been a sad one, poor child. It shall be my task to repay you for the hardships you have had to meet in your short life."

Little Jack seemed to take instinctively to the rough-looking but, kind-hearted old man. The poor match boy seemed to have drifted into a haven of rest.

"Shall I ever have to go back to Peggy?" he asked.

"Never, my child. This good lady," indicating Mrs. Manning, "will supply the place of your own mother."

"I will sell matches for you, if you want me to, grandfather. I didn't like working for Peggy, but I will work for you."

"My dear Jack, instead of working you must go to school, and learn all you can. When you are grown up, it will be time for you to work."

It soon became noised about that the little boy, who was seen about the village with Mark, was the hermit's grandson. But the grandson of old Anthony was not considered a very important person, and only excited passing interest.

Mark was let into the secret of the new home to which Mr. Taylor proposed to move, and he

was naturally pleased to think that his mother's condition was to be so much improved.

Nothing had leaked out in the village, however, about the contemplated removal.

The week was nearly ended when Mark happened to meet James Collins in the street. James had been informed by his father that Mrs. Manning had received notice to leave the cottage, and it gratified his dislike of Mark. What puzzled him was, Mark's apparent indifference and evident good spirits.

"Perhaps he thinks my father will relent, and let him stay, but he'll find himself mistaken as I shall let him know when I get a chance."

The chance came that very day.

"Hallo!" said James, as Mark was about to pass him.

"Hallo!" responded Mark smiling.

"I hear you've got to move."

"So I hear."

"It's high time you were finding a new house."

"I think so myself, but that's my mother's business."

"You needn't think my father will let you stay where you are."

"Don't you think he would let us stay a month longer?"

"No, I don't.

"He wouldn't put us out in the street, would he?"

"Look here, Mark Manning, I see what you are at. You want to impose on my father's good nature. I shall warn him of your plan."

"Just as you please, James."

The result was that Squire Collins, sharing to some extent his son's apprehensions, made a call that same evening at the cottage, All the family were at home.

After the usual greetings were over, the squire said:

"I suppose, Mrs. Manning, you will be ready to move on Saturday?"

"Suppose my mother can't get a house," suggested Mark.

"She *must* find a house," said the squire, severely. "She has had time enough to find one. You mustn't blame me if I say that move you must on Saturday."

"You need have no anxiety, Squire Collins," said Mrs. Manning, with dignity. "I intend to move on that day."

"And where, may I ask?" inquired the squire. with curiosity.

"We move into the Beach house," answered

Mark, his eyes fixed with smiling interest on the village magnate.

"What!" exclaimed the squire in amazement and incredulity. "Do you mean the house near mine?"

"Yes."

"You must be crazy," he gasped. "That is a very elegant house, and the rent is high."

"I think we can pay it."

"And your furniture is unfit for so handsome a residence, even if there were enough of it."

"We hire the house with its present furniture," said Mark complacently.

"I don't understand it at all!" exclaimed the perplexed squire. "How can you, being almost a beggar, dream of living there?"

"I think, Squire Collins," said old Anthony, quietly, "that you are somewhat in error as to my young friend Mark's circumstances."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he has a very good property for a boy of his age."

Mark was as much amazed as the squire at this statement. The latter said with a sneer:

"And where is this famous property?"

"I will inform you with pleasure. There are a thousand dollars to his credit in a savings' bank

in New York, and he holds a mortgage of four thousand dollars on your manufactory."

Even Mark thought Anthony was out of his mind.

"Why," stammered the squire, "I negotiated that mortgage through Mr. Hardy, of New York."

"Exactly! The money he advanced he held in trust for Mark."

"I can't believe this!" exclaimed the squire in mortification and bewilderment.

"Is this really true, Mr. Taylor?" asked Mark.

"Yes. Let me inform you, Squire Collins, that though I have lived as a hermit, I am really a moderately rich man, and some time since transferred without his knowledge five thousand dollars to Mark here, who, as you see, is really chief owner of the shop from which you discharged him."

"I didn't dream of this?" ejaculated the squire.

"I presume not," said the hermit dryly.

"If Mark chooses to come back into the shop, I will raise his wages."

"My friend Hardy intends to offer Mark a position in his office in the city, which I think will suit him better. It only remains to say that this cottage will be vacated on Saturday."

"I don't want to inconvenience Mrs. Manning," said the squire, filled with respect by the unexpected prosperity of those whom he had come to bully. "Stay another week if you wish."

"We don't wish, thank you," said Mark.

It was a wonderful story that Squire Collins had to tell at home, and the deep chagrin of James can be imagined. But he was worldly wise, and he soon decided to court the boy he had hitherto despised. What annoyed him most was the thought Mark held a mortgage on his father's shop, and was to live in a house handsomer than his own.

Five years have elapsed since the incidents recorded above. Mark fills a responsible position in the office of Mr. Hardy, with a handsome salary. Little Jack is now a rosy, healthy child of thirteen, and those who remembered him as a match boy would not know him now. His grandfather's happiness is bound up in his little grandson, but he is still very much attached to Mark, and he has made a new will, in which he divides his fortune equally between these two.

Lyman Taylor is again within the walls of a penitentiary, having forged a check upon a well-known merchant of Chicago; and old Peggy,

taking Jack's place, is to be seen any day on Clark or State streets, with a basket of matches, which she makes an excuse for appealing to the charity of passers by. Her face is growing redder and redder, as her potations increase, and she will probably end her career in a hospital or alms-house.

James Collins is now a clerk in Newport, on a small salary, with which he is very much discontented, and from time to time asks a loan of his old schoolfellow, Mark, to whom he is now compelled to look up. He has developed extravagant tastes, and is always in debt. I greatly fear that neither his habits nor his fortunes will improve as he grows older. For our hero, Mark, and those who belong to him, we may anticipate brighter days and greater prosperity, as a fitting recompense of industry and good habits.

THE END.

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